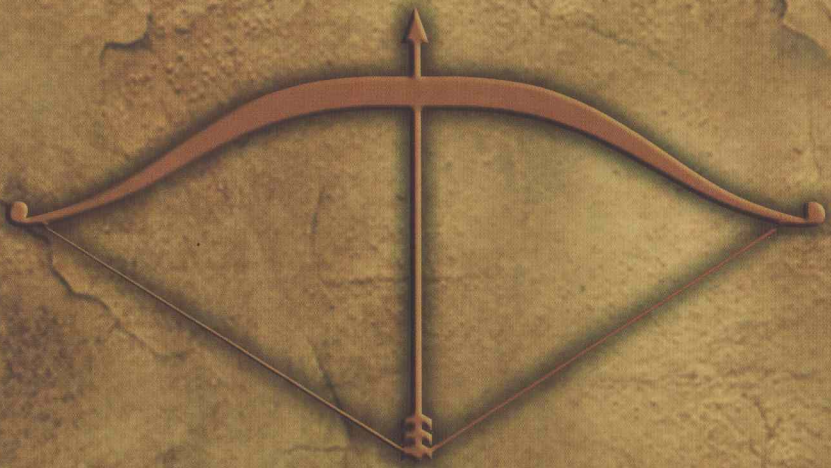
Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa

Critical Essays



M R Parameswaran

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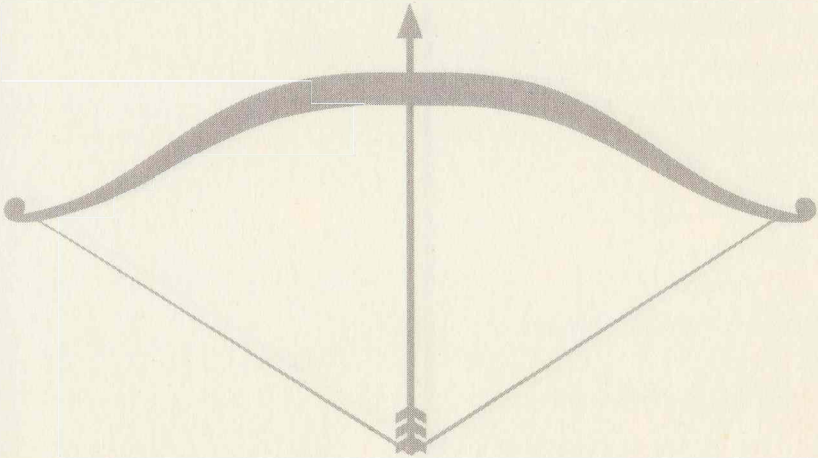

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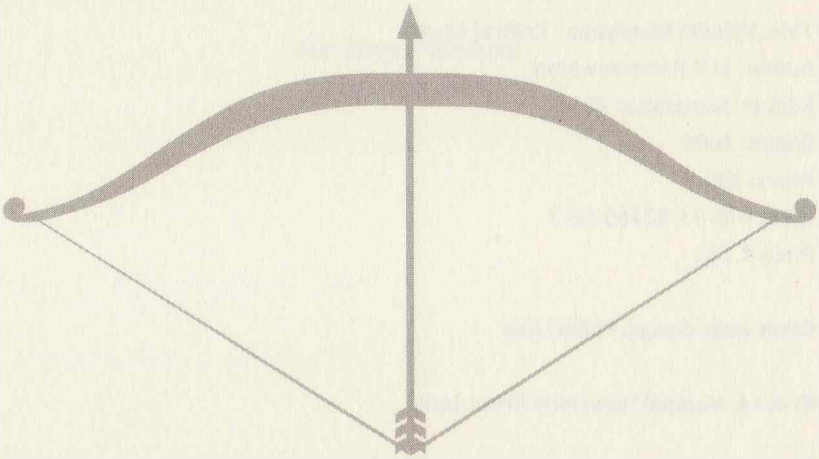

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Published by Manipal University Press (MUP)
Admin Off: Manipal Centre for European Studies (MCES)
Behind Post Office, Manipal 576 104 India

Title: Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa - Critical Essays
Author: M R Parameswaran
Edition: September, 2014
Copies: 1000
Pages: 200
ISBN: 978-93-82460-18-3

Cover-page design: Pallavi Rao

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Printed at Manipal Technologies Ltd, Manipal, India

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Dedicated
to our divine parents
Rāma and Sītā

For Kavya, Keshav,
Raji and Ravi

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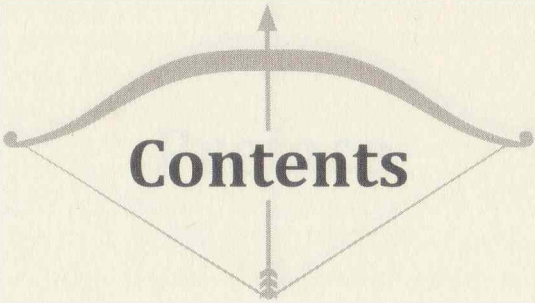

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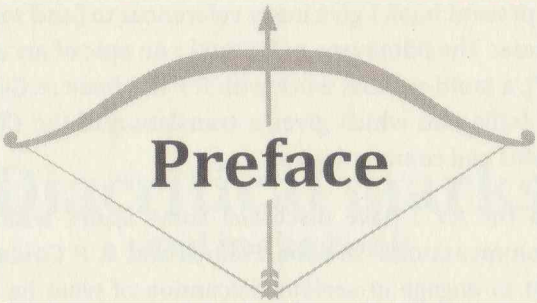

Preface

This book deals with several important events and statements found in Vālmīki's epic poem the Rāmāyaṇa. The poem was composed over 2,500 years ago. Strict methods had been adopted to preserve Vedic texts, but no strict methods were adopted to preserve the text of the Rāmāyaṇa. The poem spread to all parts of India and beyond, through narrators of the epic who sometimes added their own explanatory verses; the need felt to make some details conform to local customs also contributed some changes in the text.

In the second half of the 20th century, scholars at the Baroda Oriental Research Institute after many years of labour and examination of over 2,000 different manuscripts compiled what is now accepted as the most reliable version of the poem. We denote it by the symbol CE. Good academic scholars use only the CE in their discussion of the Rāmāyaṇa. But it must be noted that the CE consists of material that is common to the largest number of the over 2,000 manuscripts examined. It does not mean that everything in the CE is asserted to be a part of Vālmīki's original composition; for the earliest existing Ramayana manuscripts were written several centuries — perhaps a thousand years or more — after Vālmīki had composed his epic poem. By that time, many changes — alterations and additions — had crept into the manuscripts. For instance, the CE contains also, what is called the Uttara-Kāṇḍa (in symbols: U-K). The present book shows what most scholars in fact recognize, that the U-K cannot really be a part of the epic as composed by Vālmīki (see the Appendix at the end of the book).

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Indian scholars have not written much on the CE, but American authors have. In the present book I give many references to (and some criticism of) in particular The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki : An epic of ancient India (in symbols, RV), a multi-volume work with R P Goldman as General Editor, available in India and which gives a translation of the CE, as well as extensive notes and commentaries.

In regard to the RV, I have discussed some issues with two of the translator-commentators: Sheldon Pollock and R P Goldman. Pollock did not want to engage in serious discussion of what he had written about 36-37 years earlier. Goldman on the other hand, discussed many of the issues; he also said that his views on many questions are not the same as he had held many years ago.

Another American academic, Wendy Doniger, has written about Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa as well as about Rāma and Sītā in several of her books. She repeatedly claims to be a Sanskritist; but this claim was debunked some years ago by Prof Witzel of Harvard University. Indeed, even a child who has had an elementary course in Sanskrit will be shocked to learn that Professor Doniger repeatedly translates the word "vakṣasi" as "in the back". (The word means "in the chest.") Prof Doniger herself has said that the U-K is a later "accretion" to the Rāmāyaṇa; yet, in her recent book The Hindus she repeats several paragraphs from the U-K in her discussion of the VR (the symbol VR stands for the Ramayana of Vālmīki, the Sanskrit original; the symbol RV stands for the multi-volume work in English by Goldman et al and stands for the phrase: "The Vālmīki Ramayana: An epic of India'). Her writings contain a large number of mistakes. She is distinguished for her lack of academic sense. Perhaps that is why she is called a "distinguished" professor.

Some time ago, I raised some 40 questions about what she had said about the VR, but she declined to enter into a discussion on any of them.

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Diacritical marks
used in the book

The following diacritical marks are used, generally following the International system:

a A : like u in cut;
i I : like I in fit;
u U : like u in full;
e E : like a in lake
au AU : like ow in owl;
ṛ Ṛ : a sound between ri and ru;
c C : like ch in chess
ṭ : like t in tower
ḍ : like d in dad
t : like th in path
d : like th in father
ṅ : like ng in sing
ñ : like n in inch
ṇ : like n in Rāvaṇa, auṇt
ś Ś : as in Śrī, Śiva
ṣ Ṣ : like sh, Sh in she, She

ā Ā : like a in car
ī Ī : like ee in feet
ū Ū : like oo in fool
o O : like oa in boat
ai Ai : like eyr

The h in bh, ch, dh, ḍh, th, ṭh, etc., denotes that the preceding letter is "aspirated" (that is, said forcefully).

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Introduction

During the twenty-five or more centuries after Vālmīki had composed the epic poem known as the Rāmāyaṇa, its text got corrupted and several versions arose in various parts of India. These versions differ from one another, sometimes trivially and sometimes quite substantially. (In what follows, the term Vālmīki refers to the text, and not to a person in the text itself, unless expressly stated otherwise.) The Oriental Research Institute in Baroda (Vaḍodara), India in the middle of the last century engaged a large number of scholars to examine more than 2,000 palm-leaf and other manuscripts that were available in India and Nepal. After several years of scrutiny, the scholars compiled what is called the 'Critical Edition' (abbr.: CE) of Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa (abbr.: *VR*). It is acknowledged to be the most reliable text of the epic.

Most people even in India know the Rāmāyaṇa — the story of Rāma and Sītā — only through versions of the Rāmāyaṇa in the regional languages, or by listening to expositions of the recension of the epic that is popular in the region in which they live. None of the recensions correspond exactly to the CE. There are no translations of the CE in any Indian language. Nor were there any in English (or in any other language) till a group of scholars in America, under the leadership of Prof R P Goldman undertook the task of translating the CE into English. Six volumes have already been published (by the Princeton University Press), with translation, notes and comments. We shall denote this multi-volume work by the symbol *RV*. Each volume of *RV* contains a large number of comments by the editor of the volume. The volumes are readily available

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not only in America but also in India. As the only available English translation of the Rāmāyaṇa, the *RV* is in danger of being considered *authoritative.* My study therefore often refers to the *RV.*

The translation in the *RV* makes good reading and is generally acceptable, although it is not free from errors (especially in volumes 2–4). However, the translator's attitude may influence the translation, which in turn might reinforce his/her attitude, and the average reader has access only to the translator's judgments on various issues. Also, the volumes are not totally consistent with one another. In each volume of the *RV*, the introductory chapters, which contain the comments of the translator and commentator of the particular volume, are much less acceptable than the translation as a whole (again, especially in volumes 2–4). The introductory chapters in especially volumes 2–4 of the *RV*, from which the average reader will form his/her opinions, often give a slanted and highly distorted picture of the characters in the Rāmāyaṇa, almost always tending to deny or diminish the nobility of the characters in the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, whether it be Daśaratha, Kausalyā, Sugrīva, or even Rāma himself.

Several of commentator Pollock's comments especially in vol. 2 are quite unacceptable, as we shall see; and he hypothesizes also what a pre–Vālmīkian text of the Rāmāyaṇa had said. His comments would hence in fact be irrelevant to the study of Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa as given by the Critical Edition. Besides, it should be noted that R P Goldman (2003, p. 22), the General Editor of the volumes and without doubt the best American scholar dealing with the Rāmāyaṇa, says that there is no evidence of an earlier version of the Rāma story ever having actually existed. Many comments of the commentators' in especially volumes 2–4 bring to one's mind a remark by R P Goldman who said, "characters like Rāma or the Buddha . . . resonate faintly, if at all, with western scholars."[1] It should be noted that the famous poet and literary critic A K Ramanujan (1992) has said of the translation, introductions and

1 R P Goldman, The Rāmāyaṇa and the problem of an "Asian" cultural area: Vālmīki's values in India and beyond, *Purāṇa,* vol. XLV, No. 1 (Jan. 2003), pp. 7–37.

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footnotes of *RV*: "[They] inevitably contain twentieth-century attitudes and misprisions" (p.45). One should note Ramanujan's choice of the word 'misprisions'; it means mistakes and misunderstanding as well as scorn and contempt; and his words "twentieth-century attitudes" could be taken to mean "American/western/Judeo-Christian" attitudes.

It is therefore unfortunate that many academics in India seem to have accepted whatever American academics have said. For instance, an academic at the Delhi University is reported to have said: "Every version of the Rāmāyaṇa is clear that . . . [Rāvaṇa] was a man learned and refined . . ." also that "Rāma even goes against dharma and shoots Vālī in the back . . ." That is all false; in particular, (i) Rāvaṇa cannot be called 'refined', for he had abducted many women, and (ii) no version of the Rāmāyaṇa says that Rāma shot Vālī in the back; only American academics like W Doniger (2009, pp.236, 237; again in 2014: p.523; p.528) and P Richman (2001, p.6) say so, as well as Indian academics like the Delhi University professor who is reported to have echoed their statement.[2]

During the last three decades, several North American scholars have written on topics in the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa. Unfortunately, almost all the writings suffer from certain grave defects. The scholars have accepted without proper scrutiny what their academic colleagues have said, and have built their understanding of the Rāmāyaṇa on such earlier statements of their colleagues.

1. *Some examples of errors and carelessness of scholars*

1.1 It is most surprising that the reputed Syracuse University's Moynihan Institute in its program to educate students and prospective teachers about the Rāmāyaṇa, claims with respect to several passages that they are translations by R K Narayan of passages from the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa. But none of the passages is from the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa, and R K Narayan has not translated anything from the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa. All the passages are from R K Narayan's highly fictionalized story

2 See *www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/outrage-refuses-to-die-down/article2611213.ece.*

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involving personalities and certain incidents in the epic poem. In his book, R K Narayan (1972) states explicitly that his story *"is by no means a translation, nor a scholarly study"* (p. xi).

Probably because of the erroneous presentation by the institute's program, many were led to believe that R K Narayan's book of fiction is a condensed version in English of Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, and in many universities in America courses intended to be on the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa were in fact based on R K Narayan's fictional work, since few academic scholars, if any, seem to have taken the trouble to scrutinize the Moynihan Institute's claim. American academics have tended to accept without question, statements of other western academic scholars; rarely, if ever, does any scholar question any assertion of another western scholar.

1.2 It is amazing that several western academics have, in their own works, cited J Moussaief Masson's paper in the *J. Amer. Oriental Soc.* (1975) without questioning any statement in it. The paper is in fact riddled with errors and muddling of names, confusing Sugrīva for Vālī, Hanumān for Rāma and so on; it cites the Critical Edition in its bibliography, but its arguments again and again appeal to verses rejected by the Critical Edition as spurious.

For instance, Masson (1975) cites the CE in his bibliography yet resorts to verses rejected by the CE in order to claim that Vālī had refrained from killing Sugrīva on many occasions, and that the latter was suffering from paranoia and hallucination to think that Vālī was trying to kill him (pp. 674, 676). Shulman (1979, p. 655) cites Masson and repeats Masson's claims.

1.3 Masson (1975, p. 676) resorts to spurious verses to claim also that Sugrīva was a coward; Shulman (1979, p. 654) again echoes Masson. Neither critic seems to know that Sugrīva killed in battle the mighty rākṣasas Praghasa, Virūpākṣa and Mahodara (see 6.33.24, 6.84.33, 6.85.27), and boldly challenged Rāvaṇa himself (6.47.34ff). Nor do they seem to know that Rāvaṇa's spy Śārdūla as well as Kumbhakarṇa, and Rāvaṇa himself speak highly of Sugrīva's valour and that the *VR* also praises Sugrīva's valour profusely (see Chapter 2 below).

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1.4 Masson (1975, p. 676) claims that Vālmīki gives Vālī many noble features. Shulman (1979) again echoes Masson; he adds that Sugrīva was cowardly and vindictive, and that Vālī, "by way of contrast, is portrayed as essentially heroic, noble, and magnanimous by nature" (p. 654).

Both Masson and Shulman ignore the fact that the Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly praises Sugrīva's heroism, truthfulness and other good qualities whereas the only moral qualities of Vālī mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa are his vanity and his great rage; and both scholars turn a blind eye to the fact that after the first Vālī–Sugrīva fight, when Sugrīva, wounded and bleeding, abandoned the fight and took to flight and ran toward the ṛśyamūka forest for sanctuary, Vālī, contrary to all norms of warfare, angrily pursued him and abandoned his pursuit only when Sugrīva entered the ṛśyamūka forest, which Vālī dared not enter only because of fear of Mataṅga's curse (4.12.22–23). Masson and Shulman are blind also to the fact that earlier too, when Māyāvin did not want to engage in a fight with Vālī and ran in terror, fleeing for his life, Vālī pursued him relentlessly, even into the cavern in the ground where Māyāvin thought he would be safe (4.9.9–13). In contrast, Rāma says that one should not attack one who takes to fleeing (6.67.38); even the rākṣasa Atikāya would never attack an enemy who flees (6.59.43). Vālī's behaviour shows him to be totally devoid of heroism, nobility or magnanimity.

1.5 Masson (1975, p. 675a) says that Sugrīva's first act after covering up the hole into which Vālī had disappeared in his pursuit of Māyāvin, was to take over his brother's kingdom as well as his wife. Shulman (1979, p. 654) again echoes Masson and accuses Sugrīva of hastily taking over the kingship and his brother's wife. The commentator Lefeber says that Sugrīva had no right to the kingship 'since Vālī was still alive' and also says that Sugrīva 'appropriated' Vālī's "widow" (*RV* 4, p. 42).

All three academics turn a blind eye to the fact that the kingship had been offered to Sugrīva by Vālī's ministers *more than one year after* Vālī disappeared into a cavern and was deemed to be dead; Sugrīva was in fact the rightful king when Vālī returned after his fight with Māyāvin; the scholars turn a blind eye also to the repeated statements in the Vālmīki–

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rāmāyaṇa that a kingdom without a king is in deep peril (2.61.7–25, 2.73.3, 4.19.14–16). Indeed, in the history of the entire world, there has been no kingdom, which did not choose for a whole year a successor for a king who had disappeared.

Masson, Shulman and Lefeber, all three criticize Sugrīva for 'taking over' his brother's wife Tārā; but Sugrīva took her as his wife only after Vālī was deemed dead by Vālī's own ministers, and he did not 'appropriate', that is, he did not take over without authority or right. The law, or custom, of junior levirate marriage which prevailed among many peoples, including Hebrews and Hindus, would make it Sugrīva's *duty* to marry his elder brother's widow.

1.6 Masson (1975, p.675) says that at the end of his first fight with Vālī, Sugrīva ran towards Rāma and that in their second fight Vālī was winning when Rāma killed him. Masson also says that Rāma was concealed behind a tree when he shot the fatal arrow; but a careful study shows that none of the three assertions of Masson is found in the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa, but all three are found in R K Narayan's work of fiction (1972, p. 107, 109). Many scholars, including Shulman (1979), have repeated Masson's faulty statements.

1.7 Masson (1975, p.673) says that Rāma, (when he said to Sugrīva: *I shall kill your wife's abductor: haniṣyāmi tava bhāryāpahāriṇam*), promised to *murder* Vālī for having stolen his brother Sugrīva's wife. Paula Richman (1992, p. 20, n.21) says that Rāma *murdered* Vālī. So do the commentator Lefeber (1994, p. 46) and the American academic W Doniger (2009, p. 236). These academics have overlooked that the word *"murder"* means 'killing someone unlawfully and with premeditated malice' and that Rāma shot the arrow at Vālī, fatally wounding him, only because death is the *prescribed punishment for the incest committed by Vālī — and for no other reason.* Rāma repeatedly tells Vālī that he was only meting out the mandated punishment for incest (4.18.18–22).

1.8 The Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa says that Vālī was shot *in the chest* (4.16.25, *vakṣasi*). Yet, K Erndl (1992, p.67) says that Rāma killed Vālī *from behind*

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his back. The American scholar Richman (2001: p. 6) too says that Vālī was shot in the back; and the well-known American professor W Doniger who claims to be a Sanskrit scholar says so repeatedly. It is a pity that some Indian professors too, apparently following Doniger, say that Vālī was shot in the back.

1.9 Some people, like the commentator Lefeber (*RV* 4, p. 7), mistakenly think that Rāma shot the fatal arrow at Vālī in an ambush while the latter was fighting with Sugrīva, or that Vālī was shot in the back; (See Masson, 1975, p.672, p. 675; Goldman 1984, *RV* 1 p.10). But the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa does not say that Rāma was hidden when he shot the arrow and in fact says that he shot the arrow when the fight was, at least for all practical purposes, over: Vālī was already badly wounded, his limbs were broken and he was tottering, and therefore totally incapable of defending himself against the next blow that Sugrīva, who was still agile, could have dealt him.

1.10 Masson (1975) says that "Vālmīki characterizes Vālī's reproaches against Rāma as 'words that are wholesome and just' (4.17.12: *praśritaṃ* vākyam)" (p.676). Masson ignores verse 4.18.3 where Vālmīki refers to Rāma's reply to Vālī as "unsurpassed words distinguished by righteousness and statecraft", and ignoring also verses 4.18.41, 42 and 52 where Vālmīki says Vālī finally saw 'things clearly' and agreed with Rāma and asked to be forgiven for his own words of reproach. R P Goldman (2004: p.10) not only repeats Masson's claim but reinforces it; he cites both 4.17.12 and 4.18.1 and says that Vālmīki repeatedly describes Vālī's speech "as civil and consistent with righteousness" (p.35). The observations on Masson's remarks also apply to Goldman. Masson's and Goldman's errors are due to failure to understand the poet's practice of almost always saying some words of praise to the speech of anyone who starts an argumentative dialogue, that is, to the *pūrvapakṣa* of a debate; but the response, the *siddhānta*, is what is really correct, even if the poet does not explicitly say so.

1.11 When Rāma asked Sugrīva for the reason for Vālī's hostility towards him, the latter narrated a detailed story. Masson (1975, p. 674)

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says that Sugrīva's story "stinks", and he does so without giving any reasons for his conclusion. Pollock (1991p. 353) cites Masson's above paper without comment. R P Goldman (1993,) says, without giving any justification, that "Sugrīva tells Rāma a highly coloured tale of his conflict with Vālī" (p.144). R P Goldman & Sally J Sutherland Goldman (1996) calls it a "self-serving account" (p.73). R P Goldman says that *"Sugrīva's story... has a number of inconsistencies"* (2004: note 69); he does not point out any, but again merely cites Masson's paper, which had no examples either.

The above mentioned critics fail to note that the poet, the author of the epic, calls Sugrīva's story "an exact account of the reason for [Vālī's] hostility" (4.8.45: *vairasya kāraṇaṃ tattvam ākhyātum upacakrame*). It should be noted also that the poet has given high praise of Sugrīva's character and virtue, calling him a *dharmātmā* (4.2.4), *mahātmā* (4.3.1, 4.15.1, and 4.35.12), śrīmān (6.2.1) and *sattvasaṃpannaḥ* (4.28.27).

We see that the scholars seem to have accepted each other's statements without proper scrutiny and through a cycle of repetition elevated erroneous statements to canonical level.

2. *Understanding the Rāmāyaṇa*

2.1 Let us consider a type of evidence that may be available for one to make an assertion about anything in the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa: in order of importance, what the author of the epic says in the text; and next, statements made by the characters in the poem, like Daśaratha, Rāma, Kausalyā, Hanumān, Rāvaṇa and others. The *opinions* expressed by commentators, ancient or modern, are not evidence. Not all statements by characters in the Rāmāyaṇa are true in their literal sense; we have to consider each in context and also along with other evidence in the Rāmāyaṇa.

One should be sensitive also to speech-mannerisms of characters in the poem; for instance, some people tend to give the greatest cognizance and the greatest importance to whoever is in their immediate presence;

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for instance, Rāma pays tribute to Jaṭāyu saying that the bird's death caused him more sorrow than the abduction of Sītā (3.64.25). Rāma's words should not be taken in their literal sense. For, Rāma had already received news of Sītā, that she had been abducted by Rāvaṇa; Jaṭāyu had also told Rāma that Sītā would be recovered soon, since it was the *muhūrta* vinda when she was abducted, and any loss incurred during *vinda* will be recovered soon (3.64.12–13).

Similarly, when Rāma says that without Lakṣmaṇa, victory over Rāvaṇa, his life and Sītā are all of no value (6.89.7, 28); we should not take the words in their literal meaning. *Sarga* after *sarga* in the Rāmāyaṇa describes how devastated Rāma felt at the loss of Sītā. When Rāma talks to, or about, any friend or relative, he refers to that person as the most valued person in his life; also, at times, his words are pure hyperbole, as for instance when he says that he cannot live even for a moment without Sītā (5.64.10); they indicate an intensity of feeling, but are not to be taken literally. Above all, the context in which any particular statement is made (by anybody) is very important.

2.2 In particular, one should not have 'tunnel–vision' where one takes into account the words in one statement and overlook what is said elsewhere in the Rāmāyaṇa. We have to take into consideration as to who is making the statement as well as the context in which the statement is made. Some critics have been guilty of ignoring these principles. Questionable translation of words in the Rāmāyaṇa as well as tunnel–vision can lead to serious errors.

3. *Some examples of errors in understanding the Rāmāyaṇa*

3.1 *Mantharā's words:* The commentator Pollock (1984) interprets Mantharā's words *'yadi ced bharato dharmāt pitryaṃ rājyam avāpsyati'* in 2.8.23 as "if Bharata secures, as by rights he should, the kingship of his forefathers" (*RV* 2). But the word *dharmāt* here means not *'by rights'*, but *'in a just, lawful way.'*

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If Mantharā had thought that Bharata had any *right* to succeed Daśaratha, she would have dinned it into Kaikeyī's ears; but she did not mention it even once. This also indicates that Pollock's translation of verse 2.8.23 is incorrect and misleading.

Anyway, is Mantharā a reliable witness? She tells Kaikeyī about Daśaratha: "He talks of righteousness, but is deceiving you . . . he is cruel (2.7.20); when expedient he reassures you, but it is all worthless (2.7.21); he is an enemy pretending to be your husband; he is like a viper whom you have taken to your bosom (2.7.23)", and in the same conversation, a few minutes later, she says: "Your husband has always adored you, I have no doubt about it. For your sake, he will even go through fire . . . He will give up his own life to please you" (2.9.17–19). Therefore, one cannot consider Mantharā a credible witness.

3.2 *Daśaratha's alleged promise:* Verse 2.99.3 contains Rāma's words consoling a highly distraught Bharata and says that Daśaratha had promised, at the time he married Kaikeyī, that her son would be his successor. Relying on Pollock's translation of 2.8.23 and taking 2.99.3 as literally true, Pollock (p.62, n.9) and Sally J M Sutherland (1992, p. 244), too says that in choosing Rāma for consecration as yuvarāja, Daśaratha betrayed Kaikeyī by failing to keep his promise to her and to her family. Neither Mantharā nor Kaikeyī ever said anything like that. (See the chapter on Daśaratha for more on verse 2.99.3.)

3.3 *On Rāvaṇa's "beauty":* The concomitance of beauty and virtue is implied in much of Sanskrit literature, including in the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa. The commentator Pollock (1991, p.82) is therefore struck by a description of Rāvaṇa's appearance as extraordinarily handsome (5.8.7:*surūpaṃ kāmarūpiṇaṃ*) and he struggles, unsuccessfully, to deal with the description. The commentators R P Goldman and S J Goldman (1996, p. 68–69) echo Pollock and also struggle, again unsuccessfully, to deal with the description of Rāvaṇa's appearance as beautiful.

All three commentators have erred in more than one way. They have overlooked the significance of the epithet *kāmarūpin* (meaning 'one

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who can assume any form he wishes') applied to Rāvaṇa in 5.8.7, and they have failed to note that the real form of Rāvaṇa is described in 3.47.6, 8–9, 17 (*svam rūpaṃ kālarūpābhaṃ, saṃraktanayanaṃ . . . tīkṣṇadaṃṣṭram*, 'real form resembling Death, with blazing red eyes and sharp fangs'). They have failed to note also that the *U–K* (which work they do refer to in their works) describes Rāvaṇa's (real) form at birth as hideous, loathsome and exceedingly frightful (U–K 9.21–22: *sudāruṇaṃ, bībhatsaṃ*).

3.4 *Some astonishing cases of tunnel–vision or wilful blindness:* The commentator Pollock (1984, p.16) makes the surprising claim that everyone in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* expects Bharata to mount a struggle for power: Daśaratha (*sarga* 4), Kausalyā (69), Guha (78), Bharadvāja (84–85), and, of course Lakṣmaṇa (90)". At this point, we consider the case of Bharadvāja. The seer did say to Bharata that he hoped that Bharata did not intend to harm Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in order to enjoy unchallenged kingship (2.84.13). Pollock's claim is apparently based on that verse. But he ignores what the seer said *almost immediately after.* Immediately after Bharata protested his innocence and declared that he had come only to persuade Rāma to return to Ayodhyā, Bharadvāja said that he *knew* what was in Bharata's heart and that he only questioned him so that Bharata's fame will be magnified by his reply (2.84.20). One wonders whether Pollock's claim is due to extreme tunnel–vision or wilful blindness. We must take Bharadvāja's words in 2.84.20 in their literal sense; he was a great seer, who by his ascetic power provided houses for the soldiers in Bharata's army, stables for the horses and elephants, a palace for Bharata and heavenly food and entertainment for all of them (2. *sarga* 85); later we shall find that sitting in his hermitage he was aware of all that had happened to Rāma during the many years of his exile (see 6.112.9–14).

Even more astonishing is the following case of tunnel vision and misrepresentation. In the episode where Sītā entered the fire, the gods tell Rāma: "Sītā is [the goddess] Lakṣmī, you are Lord Viṣṇu" (6.105.25: *sītā lakṣmīr bhavān viṣṇur devaḥ*). The well–known American professor

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W Doniger (1986, p. 131) however says, "(Rāma) is reminded by the gods that he is a god like them. Nothing is said here of Sītā's being a goddess . . ." In her remarks on the epic poem, Doniger does not care for what the poem really says. Two glaring instances were cited earlier. To cite only a few more of other numerous instances: she repeatedly asserts that when Sītā had been carried off to Laṅkā by Rāvaṇa, Rāma won her back after many years of battle, and so on (W. Doniger,1975, p.198; 1997, p.21; 2009, p. 221, p.232; 2014 p.523). But the entire Laṅkā war was fought during the last month of Sītā's captivity and her captivity itself lasted no more than one year.

3.5 *Ignoring some relevant passages, or more tunnel-vision:* The commentator Pollock (*RV* 2, pp.15–16) makes the erroneous remark: "[In] Kiṣkindhā, force is explicitly promoted as the only correct means of dealing with infringements of righteousness (4.18.21). . . No attempt at reconciliation is made." Pollock's remark is highly misleading. In verses 4.18.18–22, Rāma tells Vālī the reason for shooting an arrow at him. He told Vālī: "You have appropriated your brother's wife while the brother is still alive; due to your lust, you have been cohabiting with her, whom you should treat as your daughter-in-law. Thereby you have violated moral conduct. For this violation, only corporal punishment is proper. For one whom due to lust violates his daughter, sister or brother's wife, the prescribed punishment is death." Pollock's remark deliberately ignores what is stated in verses 4.18.18–22, which forms one unit. The verses clearly show that Rāma judged Vālī as guilty, not of a minor act that can be glossed over merely as an *"infringement of righteousness"* as Pollock phrases it, but of *incest*, a heinous crime for which the mandated punishment was death. It was not a political dispute, nor a misunderstanding, and was not a matter for negotiation with the criminal. Nor was it something to be settled by combat.

3.6 *Taking verses out of context:* It was the first night after Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā had crossed the Gaṅgā, after taking leave of Sumantra that Rāma, while talking with Lakṣmaṇa said to him: "After the arrival of Bharata and obtaining the kingdom, will Kaikeyī leave Dasaratha alive? I

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think she came to our family in order to bring about the end of Dasaratha, to send me on exile and to secure the kingship for her son Bharata. On my account, will she not persecute Kausalyā and Sumitrā?" (2.47.6–12, 14–15). Pollock (1986)) correctly comments that Rāma spoke those words, probably not because he meant them but as preamble to verse 16 where he tells Lakṣmaṇa: "You must return to Ayodhyā and protect Sumitrā and Kausalyā" (p. 56 n.6, p. 412 n.7).

Verse 13 says that one who pursues sensual pleasure and neglects virtue will soon come to grief like Daśaratha. The verse, when taken out of context, appears to condemn Daśaratha as a victim of lust. Pollock takes the verse as literally meant by Rāma and calls it 'perhaps the most important — gnomic — statement of the book' (*RV* 2, p. 60). Pollock does so although it appears in the middle of a group of verses that he himself says should probably not be taken literally but as a ruse to make Lakṣmaṇa return to Ayodhyā. One wonders whether commentator Pollock suffers from extreme tunnel–vision or wilful blindness. I consider him to be quite mistaken in his comment on 2.47.13; he uses the literal interpretation of the verse to condemn Daśaratha as a victim of lust. His commentary on the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is indeed full of condemnation of the king, presenting a picture quite contrary to that found in the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa. (More details and a discussion of verse 2.47.13 may be found in the chapter on Daśaratha.)

4. *Some techniques of Vālmīki*

One has to be alert and sensitive to the nuances and techniques of Vālmīki, which tell us how the text should be read and understood. Some instances are mentioned below.

(1) ***Praise of the pūrvapakṣa:*** It seems to be the case also that Vālmīkī's words do not always reflect his own thoughts or view, but sometimes anticipate and reflect the feeling of his ordinary listeners. For instance, the ordinary person would consider both the *pūrvapakṣa* and the *siddhānta* of any debate, each considered by itself, as reasonable. This also explains why Vālmīki describes Vālī's reproaches of Rāma as just and wholesome

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words (4.17.12, 4.18.1: *praŚrītaṃ vākyaṃ dharmārthasahitaṃ*). But he refers to Rāma's response as words of highest righteousness (4.18.3: *dharmārthaguṇasaṃpannam . . . anuttamam*), words that enabled Vālī to see things 'clearly' (4.18.52; *vyaktadarśana*).

(2) *The* ***repeated use of a certain word or a specific combination of words, or the injection of an apposite word at a strategic point***: For example, (a) the *VR* says that just before Rāma is about to tell Kausalyā that he has to go into exile for 14 years according to Daśaratha's promise to Kaikeyī , Kausalyā referred to Daśaratha as *satyapratijña*; (b) the repeated use of the word *dharma* in the Kausalyā–Rāma 'debate', where both argue in the *'dhārmik'* plane as to whether he should go into exile, or if he did go, whether he should take her also along with him; (c) Rāma's description of Daśaratha as *satyaḥ satyābhisaṃdhaś ca nityam satyaparākramah* (2.19.7). The words loudly and clearly trumpet Daśaratha's truthfulness and leave a powerful impression on us, the poet's audience.

(3) ***Vālmīkī's choice of words in a context:*** Rāma had just agreed to let Sītā accompany him to the forest when Lakṣmaṇa begged that he be allowed to accompany them. Rāma wanted to dissuade him. He hit upon the clever ruse of saying that Lakṣmaṇa should stay back in Ayodhyā to sustain Kausalyā and Sumitrā, since, once in power Kaikeyī would not treat them properly (2.28.2, 4). Because he used that clever stratagem, Vālmīki describes him as clever with words (2.28.5: *vākyakovida*); but Lakṣmaṇa was clever too (2.28.5: *vākyajña*), and gently answered that Bharata would scrupulously honour Kausalyā and Sumitrā (2.28.5–6). Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were two clever speakers, engaged not in a serious debate but in some gentle sparring with words. It is probably the only occasion where both the brothers are described as '*clever* speakers' *(vākyakovida; vākyajña)*; Vālmīki adds that Lakṣmaṇa's reply was couched in 'gentle words' *(ślakṣṇayā girā)*. The conversation is not a real debate between the brothers, but is meant for us, the audience.

After Khara and his army had been annihilated by Rāma, Śūrpaṇakhā went to Rāvaṇa and kindled his lust by describing Sītā's beauty. His lust

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kindled, Rāvaṇa decided to abduct Sītā. He went to Mārīca to get his help; but, being a clever speaker, he was not willing to reveal that he was lusting for Sītā. In an attempt to fool Mārīca, Rāvaṇa told him, that he wanted to abduct Sītā so that, it would then be easy to kill Rāma who would be distraught. Vālmīki indicates this by introducing Rāvaṇa's speech as that of a "clever speaker" (3.33.38: *vākyakovida*). Then Vālmīki describes Mārīca likewise, as a 'master of the art of speech' (*vākyaviśārada*) and 'very clever' (*mahāprājña*) (3.35.1), to indicate that Mārīca saw through Rāvaṇa's pretence. Indeed, we find that Mārīca advised Rāvaṇa *to be content with his own wives* (3.36.26: *bhava svadāraniratah*).

Comment: *Some scholars simply believe Rāvaṇa's words that he wanted to abduct Sītā in order to destroy Rāma (see for instance Goldman 1984, RV 1, p. 9), and as revenge on Rāma for killing Khara and others. They overlook that although Rāvaṇa said: "With Rāma in agony over the theft of his wife, I shall easily slay him (3.34.20)", and that he would find no rest until he killed Rāma in combat (3.52.23), yet, he made no attempt to confront Rāma for nearly a whole year after he abducted Sītā, till Rāma came to Laṅkā to kill him. Even then, he let others fight against Rāma before he himself confronted Rāma.*

The poet astutely indicates to us the mental attitudes of Sugrīva and Vālī before they engage in their fight. The poet says that Sugrīva had to *summon his anger* to let out a roar (4.14.2: *krodham āhārayat bhṛśam*) and then goes on to say that Rāma had to goad him into emitting a truly mighty roar to make Vālī come out (4.14.15: *kuru taṃ śabdaṃ niṣpatadyena vānaraḥ*). In contrast, the poet describes Vālī again and again as consumed by great rage (4.15.1, 2, 3, 4; 4.16.12, 14, 17).

Before describing the fight, the poet describes Sugrīva as a master of the art of battle (4.16.17: *raṇapaṇḍita*), and thus indicates to us that Sugrīva will rout Vālī; indeed in the battle, Vālī's limbs were completely shattered, while Sugrīva remained quite agile (4.16.21–24; 4.19.2).

In the only Aṅgada–Sugrīva conversation in the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, we can see evidence that Aṅgada was not quite mature. He had not

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appreciated that Sugrīva loved him dearly as his own son. When Sugrīva exclaimed: "Why are the monkey–troops fleeing?" Aṅgada, whom the poet here refers to as *Vālīputra*, answered rather irreverently to Sugrīva: "Don't you see Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa lying unconscious?" The poet then describes Sugrīva's reply as addressed to *"his son Aṅgada"* (6.40.2–4: *putram aṅgadam)*. The poet thus subtly indicates that Aṅgada still regarded himself only as Vālī's son, while Sugrīva regarded him as his own son, as he had promised to Vālī.

5. *The use of tags*

Commentators have noticed, but not to its full extent, that Vālmīki often encapsulates in a formulaic epithet some specific quality of persons. Often what appears to be an ornamental epithet carries narrative significance. Phrases or "tags" used, like *"rāmo dharmabhṛtām varaḥ"* (Rāma, the supreme upholder of *dharma*) make an abiding impression on the listener/reader. The commentator Pollock (*RV* 2, p. 50) notes this, but then errs in saying that no tags "are, or could have been provided" by the poet for Daśaratha (or for Kausalyā or Kaikeyī).

But there is more than one way of providing "tags" to emphasize the character of a person. On numerous occasions Vālmīki uses phrases which on the surface look like praise of Rāma (or Bharata or Lakṣmaṇa), but contains within it the same praise of Daśaratha. Consider the manner in which the poet refers to some great quality of Daśaratha. He uses phrases like the following:

(1) "Mighty Rāma, son of Daśaratha"
(1.66.21: *dṛśṭavīryo me rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ*)

(2) "Righteous son of Daśaratha" [Bharata]
(2.87.3: *dharmātmā daśarathātmajaḥ*)

(3) "Bharata, glorious son of Daśaratha"
(2.106.19: *bharataḥ śrīmān daśarathātmajaḥ*)

(4) "Lakṣmaṇa, valorous son of Daśaratha"
(6.76.7: *vīraṃ daśarathātmajam*)

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(5) "Mighty Rāma, son of Daśaratha"
(3.20.18: *tejaḥsamāyukto rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ*)

(6) "Handsome like Manmatha, Rāma the son of Daśaratha"
(3.32.5: *kāṇḍarpasamarūpaś ca rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ*)

(7) On Rāma: "righteous son of Daśaratha"
(3.56.1: *daśarathātmajaḥ . . . dharmātmā*)

(8) On Bharata: "righteous son of Daśaratha"
(2.87.3: *dharmātmā daśarathātmajaḥ*)

(9) "Mighty Rāma, son of Daśaratha"
(3.71.20: *tejasvī rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ*)

(10) "Virtuous Rāma, son of Daśaratha"
(4.4.5: *mahātmānam rāmam daśarathātmajam*)

(11) "Daśaratha's son Rāma, who understood all things"
(4.5.18: *sarvārthavidvāṃsaṃ rāmaṃ daśarathātmajam*).

We are struck by the fact that on numerous occasions when Rāma (or Bharata or Lakṣmaṇa) is praised for some quality, the poet refers to him as "the son of Daśaratha." This trumpeting as "the son of Daśaratha" in fact conveys that Daśaratha was famous for the quality that is mentioned immediately before or after. It is almost like saying that Rāma (or Bharata or Lakṣmaṇa) has that particular quality as a quality *inherited* from Daśaratha, that is, *because Daśaratha had that quality.* Indeed, this is borne out by Bharata's words: "How could I, a son *born of Daśaratha — that man of honourable family and honourable deeds* — commit an unrighteous act?" (2.98.48: *kathaṃ daśarathāj jātaḥ śuddhābhijanakarmaṇaḥ | kuryāṃ karma jugupSītām?*). Also similar are his words: "How could a son born of Daśaratha ever become a usurper of kingship?" (2.76.11: *katham daśarathāj jāto bhaved rājyāpahārakaḥ*). It is seen also from Hanumān's words: "Born in the family of Ikṣvākus, Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, is known for his righteousness." (4.5.3: *ikṣvākūṇāṃ kule jāto rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ | dharme nigaditaḥ . . . ||*).

We can therefore conclude that the tag *daśarathātmaja* is used quite often to praise Daśaratha for some quality and that the examples cited

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above in fact say that Daśaratha was mighty, glorious, valorous and righteous.

6. *The Kausalyā Principle*

This Principle, enunciated by Kausalyā herself, is very important and deserves detailed treatment.

Mantharā, Daśaratha, Kausalyā, Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān, Aṅgada... have all made certain statements each of which is either not true when interpreted literally, or did not reflect the speaker's true feelings, or was merely hyperbole, known in Sanskrit literature as *atiśayokti.* People in medieval as well as in modern times have often taken the statements as literally meant and literally true, and have been led to misunderstanding the Rāmāyaṇa itself. Many of the statements in question should really be viewed in light of what we may call the Kausalyā Principle. The genesis of this principle is described below.

The evening before the day fixed for Rāma's consecration as Prince–Regent, Rāma went to his mother Kausalyā and requested her: "Please see that the auspicious rites appropriate for my consecration are performed today" (2.4.37). Before dawn, of the next day, Rāma awoke, and dressed in a spotless *kṣauma* garment, offered his prayers.

Meanwhile, during the night that passed, Kaikeyī had stood by her boon demanding the exile of Rāma. When he went to see Daśaratha early in the next morning, Rāma readily agreed to go on exile, even though Daśaratha himself did not directly ask him to do so. Then Rāma went to see and inform Kausalyā of the development. He found her, dressed in formal *kṣauma* garments and offering her prayers in accordance with the Vedic rites (2.17.7), seeking blessings for Rāma whom she thought was going to be consecrated in a few hours. When Kausalyā, who was looking forward to the joyous event heard from Rāma that he was in fact going on exile, she was "swept by a sorrow the like of which she had never known before, and she fainted" (2.17.17). Even after she recovered, she was still tortured by such unhappiness the like of which

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she had never experienced before (2.17.19), and wailed that she "had cherished hopes to find in her son the joy and comfort she said she had not found in her marriage" (2.17.22).

Kausalyā's words in 2.17.22 have been misinterpreted by some commentators like Pollock (1984, *RV* 2, p.49) and others as proof that Daśaratha never loved Kausalyā, that she was spurned by Daśaratha, and so on. The question however is: Can we take Kausalyā's words seriously and literally, when we note the circumstances in which they were uttered, when her mind was tortured by unhappiness by the sudden news of Rāmā's exile?

The answer is given in the Rāmāyaṇa itself, and indeed by Kausalyā herself. Five days after Rāma left for the forests, the charioteer Sumantra returned, after Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā crossed the river Gaṅgā. Seeing the charioteer return but not Rāma, Kausalyā was again swept by grief and fell to the floor (2.51.28). Sumantra's efforts to calm her were a failure and she continued to be tormented by grief (2.54.20). Weeping for Rāma, she spoke in bitter anguish to Daśaratha, blaming the king, and uttering harsh words (2.55.1–20; 2.56.1). The poor king confessed his own profound sorrow (2.56.4). Then Kausalyā asked to be forgiven for her harsh words, and said, "What I said was something uttered in the anguish of grief . . . Grief destroys restraint . . . grief destroys everything. An unexpected blow from an enemy might be withstood, but not an unexpected grief, however slight" (2.56.11–13).

That is, Kausalyā was saying that the words uttered by a person anguishing in grief or is otherwise highly distraught should be disregarded. We may add that words of consolation addressed to a person anguishing in grief over a dying father or husband, or is otherwise highly distraught, should also be not taken as serious judgment. Two instances are: (1) Hanumān's words to Tārā who was weeping over her dying husband Vālī, that Vālī was devoted to conciliation and forbearance (4.21.7), and (2) Rāma's words in (2.99.3) in an attempt to console Bharata whose mind was wracked by sorrow and feelings of guilt (more details are given further below).

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Similarly, words uttered by one who is suddenly overcome by an overwhelming anxiety and fear, or sorrow or anger, should not be taken as an expression of proper judgment by that person. This is well illustrated by the incident described below.

Mārīca cried out, in *Rāma's voice:* "Oh Sītā! Oh Rāma!" Sītā heard the cry and thought it was Rāma crying out, and felt that 'her heart, her very life' was jolted (3.43.2). She therefore asked Lakṣmaṇa to go and find Rāma. When he did not do so, she got very upset and shaking with fear and anger said to Lakṣmaṇa: "O son of Sumitrā! You pretend to be Rāma's friend, but act like his enemy! You want him to perish, because you covet me! You have no real affection for him!" (3.43.5–7)

Lakṣmaṇa's explanation that Rāma could not possibly be in any danger did not satisfy her, and with her eyes blazing red she spoke extremely harsh words to him (3.43.19–24), accusing him of treacherous motive. Blameless Lakṣmaṇa, his hair bristling in horror at her accusation, retorted, not directly against Sītā who, as he pointed out was a deity in his eyes (3.43.26: [Lakṣmaṇa said to Sītā]: *daivatam bhavatī mama*), but by a sharp tirade against all women. He said that the world over, women are perverse and do not care for righteousness and are sharp–tongued (3.43.26–29).

Clearly, we cannot take Sītā's and Lakṣmaṇa's words in 3.43.5–22 and 3.43.26–29 as reflecting their calm judgment. Indeed, Rāma (3.57.20–22) told Lakṣmaṇa that he should have disregarded the words uttered by Sītā in great anger (3.43.5–7, 19–24). We recall that later Sītā describes Lakṣmaṇa in glorious terms: "Lakṣmaṇa, whom Sumitrā was blessed to have as a son, is gentle, honest and righteous (*dharmātmā*), who has renounced wealth and comfort and accompanied Rāma to the forest in order to protect him (5.36.44–45). He behaves towards Rāma as towards his father, and treats me as his own mother" (5.36.46).

The commentator Pollock's translation in (1984, RV 3) of Lakṣmaṇa's word "dhik" in 3.43.29 as "Curse you and be damned!" is totally unacceptable. The word means here: 'Alas! What a pity'. Lakṣmaṇa would never curse

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Sītā. We must also note that it is only three verses earlier he had described her as his deity (3.43.26).

The principle thus arrived at shall be called the Kausalyā–principle. We look at some further examples below.

***Example* 1:** The commentator Pollock (1986, p. 49) makes the erroneous claim that 2.17.22 Daśaratha "never loved" his wife Kausalyā and that she was "superseded" when Kaikeyī arrived. But as seen above, the Kausalyā–principle tells us that Kausalyā's words in 2.17.22 should be disregarded as not really reflecting her true feelings. Daśaratha's love and respect for Kausalyā is discussed later in Chapter 1. Incidentally, Pollock himself admits, in a note buried in small print on p. 379 and which an ordinary reader is not likely to see, that there is no evidence in the Rāmāyaṇa for his claim.

***Example* 2:** The second part of the Kausalyā–principle tells us how we should view Hanumān's words to Tārā who was weeping piteously by the side of her dying husband Vālī (4.20.25). Saying that her husband was always forgiving, devoted to conciliation and righteous and therefore would have gone to heaven (4.21.7), he tried to console her. But he knew that Vālī was in fact most unforgiving and ruthless; for instance, he knew that Vālī had relentlessly pursued his bleeding and wounded brother Sugrīva who had given up his fight and was fleeing.

Note: Masson (1975, p. 676), who is cited by several western scholars, takes the verse 4.21.7 as proof of Vālī's "noble qualities" and compounds his error by attributing the words of the verse to Rāma.

***Example* 3:** Rāma had just killed Mārīca when Lakṣmaṇa came to meet him, having left the ashram at the insistence of Sītā. Rāma feared that something terrible might have happened, or might happen, to Sītā. He said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Will Kaikeyī be happy at last, having got the kingship and her son and I am dead because of Sītā and you are out of the way? Will poor Kausalyā lose her only son and have to wait upon Kaikeyī?" (3.56.7–8).Taken literally Rāma's words are highly critical of Kaikeyī.

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The question is whether they convey Rāma's true feelings towards Kaikeyī. He spoke those words when he was growing more and more afraid that Sītā might be dead, devoured by the rākṣasas aggrieved over Khara's death (3.56.9,11,16) and he felt himself "drowning in disaster" (3.56.17). The Kausalyā–principle says that Rāma's words spoken while he was in great mental distress should not be taken literally.

***Example* 4:** One way of looking at verse 2.47.13 was considered above. Another way of looking at the verse is presented in chapter 1. It is shown there that Rāma's words in 2.47.13 and other verses in that *sarga* are words uttered by him when he was tortured by unhappiness and therefore should not be taken as his sober judgment. We note here that the Kausalyā–principle is applicable to Rāma's words, as discussed in detail in chapter 1.

***Example* 5:** Many critics, including the modern commentators Lefeber (1994, p. 42) and R P Goldman and S J Goldman (1996, p. 73), have taken Rāma's accusations of Sugrīva in 4.*sarga* 29 as the literal truth, namely that Sugrīva was indulging in vulgar pleasures instead of organizing a search for Sītā. The preceding *sargas* 26 and 27 show Rāma pining for Sītā and verses 1–3 of *sarga* 29 describe him as oppressed by grief and desire and his mind so deeply tormented that he fainted. The Kausalyā principle shows that Rāma's accusations of Sugrīva may not be Vālīd, for Rāma uttered them when he was very anguished. Indeed, Lakṣmaṇa begged to be forgiven for the harsh accusations and said that he had been misled by what Rāma had said while overcome with grief (4.35.20). Rāma was not aware of what Sugrīva was doing, or had done, and Rāma in fact later — a mere few hours later — praised and thanked Sugrīva profusely (4.38.2–4).

More details are discussed later in the present book.

7. The Cain syndrome

1) Pollock (1986) says: "In Laṅkā once more, the struggle for political power among brothers is settled by the sword" (p.16). Pollock's

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statement is quite unacceptable, for there was no such struggle in Laṅkā. Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā was disapproved by his brother Kumbhakarṇa (see 6.51.1–2); he however gave up his life fighting for Rāvaṇa. Rāvaṇa's other brother Vibhīṣaṇa tried his utmost to save Rāvaṇa and Laṅkā; at the risk of causing intense displeasure and anger to Rāvaṇa, he repeatedly advised him to return Sītā to Rāma so that Laṅkā and Rāvaṇa himself may be saved from destruction (6.9.18–19, 22; 6.10.20). Vibhīṣaṇa left Laṅkā and surrendered to Rāma only after Rāvaṇa scornfully rejected his advice and declared him (in the assembly) as deserving immediate death penalty (6.10.11).

We see that there was no jealousy or rivalry among Rāvaṇa and his brothers.

2) R P Goldman (1984 p.10) says there was sibling rivalry and conflict between Sugrīva and Vālī. Lefeber (1994 p.3) says that a "dynastic struggle" existed between Sugrīva and Vālī. It is shown in the chapter on Rāma, Sugrīva and Vālī that there was no such rivalry.

3) Pollock says, "Everyone in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* expects Bharata to mount a struggle for power: Daśaratha, Kausalyā, Guha, Bharadvāja, and of course Lakṣmaṇa" (1986 p.16). He says that such struggle "was the established pattern of behaviour," and says that Rāvaṇa was told that 'There is no brotherly love among heroes' and was urged to drive his elder brother Kubera from the throne of Laṅkā. Pollock here cites verse 7.11.12.

Let us examine Pollock's assertions. (i) It is shown below in §3.1 of chapter 1 that neither Daśaratha nor any other knowledgeable person could have thought that Bharata could "mount a struggle for power" – even if he wanted to – if Rāma were made the yuvarāja. We cannot accept what some Hindu commentators and Pollock have said on the issue.

(ii) Soon after Bharata returned from Rājagṛha after Daśaratha had died, he went to see Kausalyā. Seeing him, she was overwhelmed by sorrow, and losing her consciousness, fell to the ground (2.69.5: *duḥkhārtām*

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patitām naṣṭacetanām). The poet says: "The deeply grieving Kausalyā (2.69.6: *kausalyā bhṛṣaduḥkhitā*) then said to Bharata; 'You wanted the kingdom and now you have got it'." Kausalyā's words uttered in great sorrow should perhaps not be taken seriously in their literal sense, according to the Kausalyā Principle. Besides, after listening to Bharata's immediate reply (2.69.13–28) she was convinced that Bharata did not have the least desire for the kingship. We see that Pollock's claim that Kausalyā expected Bharata to mount a struggle for power is quite absurd.

(iii) As for Guha, when he saw a huge army approaching, he wondered what its purpose might be. He wondered, "Has someone come to take us fishermen captive? Or is it perhaps Bharata coming to kill Rāma? (2.78.3–4). Perhaps he is in fact well disposed towards Rāma" (2.78.8). Clearly, this does not mean that Guha expected Bharata to mount a struggle for power; Guha was only thinking of all possibilities. Hence, we cannot accept Pollock's statement that Guha *expected* Bharata to mount a struggle for power.

(iv) Pollock's assertion that Bharadvāja rishi expected Bharata to mount a struggle for power has already been shown to be unacceptable. (See the discussion on "tunnel–vision")

(v) Pollock's claim that Lakṣmaṇa expected Bharata to mount a struggle for power: When he saw the Kosāla army approaching Citrakūṭa, Lakṣmaṇa, ever over–protective of Rāma, jumped to the conclusion that Bharata was coming with an evil intention (of getting rid of Rāma). But this does not mean that Pollock's assertion that Lakṣmaṇa was *expecting* Bharata to mount a struggle for power is Vālīd. Pollock claims in support of his assertion that it was "the established pattern of behaviour" (1986 p.16). That is, he claims that where siblings are involved there will always be jealousy and rivalry. In support of his stand, he cites 7.11.12 (from the *U–K*), where Prahasta, the captain of Rāvaṇa's army, tells Rāvaṇa to go ahead in pursuit of his desire and seize the throne of Laṅkā, driving his elder brother Kubera out. Pollock takes this as reflecting the accepted standards of morality and behaviour. But he turns the blind

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eye to the immediately preceding verses 7.11.9–10 and 11, which says that Rāvaṇa's maternal grandfather asked Rāvaṇa to become the ruler of Laṅkā (which was then ruled by Kubera), if necessary by using force; and Rāvaṇa rejected the idea, saying that "Kubera is my elder brother!". It was then that Prahasta, captain of Rāvaṇa's army, told Rāvaṇa that "there is no such thing as brotherly love feeling among heroes" (7.11.12). (As Mārīca, and later, Vibhīṣaṇa, said to Rāvaṇa using identical words: "It is very easy to find people who would say what you want to hear, but very difficult to find one who gives unpleasant but sound advice" (3.35.2, 6.10.16).) Pollock overlooks also Marutta's scornful condemnation of Rāvaṇa's action of fighting his elder brother Kubera and seizing his aerial vehicle (7.18.11).

Thus, even the *U–K*, which is really not a part of the Rāmāyaṇa, does not support what Pollock has said.

(vi) What about Rāma and Bharata? Was there any jealousy or rivalry between them? What did Rāma think of possible sibling rivalry? When Lakṣmaṇa, over–protective of Rāma, was suspicious of Bharata and said he would kill him (2.90.18), Rāma said to him, "How could a son ever kill his father, or a brother kill his brother?" (2.91.6. See note 11 below.) On his part, Bharata did not want to be king and very much wanted Rāma to return to Ayodhyā and occupy the throne.

(vii) Between the vulture Jaṭāyu and his brother Sampāti, there was only affection and no jealousy or rivalry. When they flew up the sky towards the sun, they got scorched and Sampāti shielded his brother with his wings (4.56.7), for he was dearer to him than life itself (4.55.17). Sampāti lost his wings, but not his love for Jaṭāyu (4.60.14–16).

In the Rāmāyaṇa, several groups of siblings are mentioned: Rāma and his siblings; Vālī and Sugrīva; Rāvaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa; Sampāti and Jaṭāyu. But there was no jealousy or rivalry between any pair of siblings. We are therefore led to wonder why Pollock asserts that everyone in Ayodhyākāṇḍa thought there was strong feeling of jealousy and rivalry between Bharata and Rāma, or why Goldman and Lefeber assert that there was jealousy and rivalry between Vālī and Sugrīva.

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These critics seem to be convinced that where there are siblings there will be jealousy and rivalry, a wrong notion which may be due to their western/Judeo-Christian background. Perhaps they are projecting their western archetypes onto the characters in the Rāmāyaṇa.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has dominated western thought, the first human beings were Adam and Eve. The first pair of brothers on earth were their sons Abel and Cain. Cain killed Abel due to jealousy, and thus committed the first murder mankind has known. The bible mentions several other instances also of sibling jealousy. (See *Genesis* 4:4-9; 27:8-10, 14-17; 37:25-28.) The "Cain syndrome" is a very strong and recurring archetype in western literature and therefore western critics tend to impose it on the Rāmāyaṇa as well. It is not surprising that western scholars and psychoanalysts tend to see jealousy among siblings even when it does not exist. Sibling jealousy is also featured in plays of Shakespeare, like-*The tragedy of King Lear, The taming of the shrew, Richard III* and *as you like it.*

8. *Some short remarks on the various chapters of the book*

In Ch. 1, it is shown that Daśaratha was a noble king, and that the claim by commentators R P Goldman and Sheldon I Pollock that Daśaratha was a victim of lust is contrary to what the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa says.

The chapter presents evidence shedding new light on Rāma's words in 2.99.3 and corrects views expressed by several critics of the late medieval as well as modern. (That verse says that Daśaratha had, at the time he married Kaikeyī, promised that her son would succeed him to the throne.) The chapter argues that Rāma said those words only in order to console a highly distraught Bharata, and (by the Kausalyā principle), the words should not be taken as true in a literal sense. The chapter shows that there is no justification for the criticism levelled by some critics that Daśaratha was driven by lust to exile Rāma.

The final part of the chapter shows that Kausalyā and Kaikeyī have also been misunderstood by commentators.

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In Ch. 2 it is shown that, Sugrīva was valorous and noble and that criticisms of him by many Indian as well as western critics are not Vālīd. It is shown also that Aṅgada's outbursts against Sugrīva in 4.*sargas* 52 and 54 should be disregarded as the outbursts of an immature adolescent with a tormented mind.

Ch. 3 presents a correct picture of the Sugrīva–Rāma pact, a friendship pact; most critics and commentators have misunderstood it to be a pact for some kind or other, of mutual assistance (like killing Vālī and replacing Sugrīva on the throne, in exchange for the latter's assistance in finding/recovering Sītā). It is shown also that Rāma's killing of Vālī had nothing to do with his pact with Sugrīva; that it was purely the mandated punishment for a very grave crime of Vālī having appropriated his brother's wife Rumā. Among other things, the chapter also points out that the Rāmāyaṇa does not say that Rāma was hidden when he shot the fatal arrow.

Many critics have misunderstood and misrepresented the episode where, after delivering a stunning blow to Hanumān, Rāvaṇa went on to fight against Nīla. Ch. 4 contains a discussion on the topic, as well as on the rules of warfare in the Rāmāyaṇa.

Ch. 4: I view Sītā's agni–praveśa episode as woven around a Rāma–Sītā "debate" and staged by them to teach a lesson to the world, as to whether an abducted woman should be taken back or not.

Ch. 5 shows the *'pūrvapakṣa/siddhānta'* style of several 'debates' and conversations in the Rāmāyaṇa. It shows that it is most inappropriate to come to conclusions on the basis of the *pūrvapakṣa* alone even if Vālmīki had some words of praise for it. His words of praise for the *pūrvapakṣa* are merely out of courtesy.

Ch. 6 shows that one must take into account the context of any passage before drawing conclusions from it; that one must take into account also for instance, Rāma's habit of indulging in some rhetoric, and in particular of attaching the utmost importance to the person or persons

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immediately before him; the rhetoric of Vālmīkian characters, as well as idiomatic usage such as the *na hi nindā nyāya* and hyperbole *(atiśayokti)* must also be taken into account. The chapter shows that some Indian as well as western critics have wrongly concluded that Rāma's love for Sītā was exceeded by his affection and regard for his male relatives and friends.

The Appendix shows that the *Uttara-kāṇḍa* cannot be a part of the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa and in particular that the portrayal of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa in the so-called *Uttara-kāṇḍa* is inconsistent with their portrayal in Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa proper. It shows also the *Uttara-kāṇḍa* has generally been treated in India as not a part of the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa.

The story of Rāma is a sacred religious work for large numbers of Hindus; it is a precious literary work for all mankind. It is particularly important for several religious groups, and especially so for the Śrīvaiṣṇavas.[3] It is therefore necessary that we understand it properly.

In a large number of instances, I have given the relevant Sanskrit word or passage, so that a reader who knows Sanskrit can follow the text easily. The number of passages cited is quite large: more than 1,500 in all. The present work is concerned with the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa as given by the Critical Edition (Baroda), and deals almost entirely only with writings of critics and commentators after the Critical Edition was produced.

3 But it is a bit of an exaggeration to say, as R P Goldman (2004: *RR* p. 39) and R P Goldman & S J Goldman (2004: *'Rāmāyaṇa'* p. 94) do, that the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa is "the foundational text for Śrīvaiṣṇavism".

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1
Dasaratha

§1.1 The Rāmāyaṇa says that King Daśaratha's wife Queen Kaikeyī was sulking, and to get her out of that mood, he told her that he would give her whatever she wished for; she made him promise that he would do so (2.10.6–19). She then asked, most shockingly, that Bharata be installed as Prince-Regent instead of Rāma, and that Rāma be exiled for 14 years (2.10.27–28). The king, well known for his truthfulness, was flabbergasted; he cursed her, reviled her as malicious and wicked; he pleaded with her, he cajoled her, and he begged her repeatedly to withdraw her demand (2.10.31, 32, 33, 35, 40; 2.11.5, 10, 12–13). But she would not. The king could not agree to her demand, nor could he refuse it for he felt bound by the bond of righteousness (2.12.16) since he had given his word to give her whatever she wished for. Rāma, when he heard about Daśaratha's promise to Kaikeyī, relieved the king of his dilemma and announced his decision to go on exile and thus preserve Daśaratha's truthfulness.

§1.2 Later Daśaratha lamented that he was forced by Kaikeyī, and regretted that he had not consulted his advisers, in his confusion because of his wife (who had tricked him) (2.53.16). He used the word *'strīhetoḥ'* ('because of [my] wife'); but the commentator Pollock translates it as *'for the sake of a woman'* , which is highly misleading — for the phrase *'for the sake of a woman'* means (or can mean) *'in order to obtain a woman'* and suggests that Daśaratha was a victim of lust, sexual desire.

After tricking her husband Daśaratha into promising her a boon, Kaikeyī demanded, as her boon, that Bharata be made the yuvarājā at once

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and Rāma be exiled for 14 years. Being a truthful person, Daśaratha could not bring himself to refuse Kaikeyī's demand. He had made the promise because of his wife when his mind was quite confused (2.53.16: *saṃmohāt strīhetoḥ kṛtaḥ*).

Lakṣmaṇa describes Daśaratha as "one who was bound by the [tricky] words of his wife" (2.18.2: *striyāḥ vākyavaśaṃ gataḥ*). The commentator Pollock (1986 p.121) (mis–) translates the phrase as the king "bowing to the demands of a woman". The Rāmāyaṇa says that Daśaratha's heart was "wrenched by his wife" (2.10.41: *striyā gṛhīto hṛdaye*); Pollock translates the phrase as "his heart in the grip of *a woman.*" Bharata says that Daśaratha had acted "under the constraint of his wife Kaikeyī" — that is, coerced by his wife Kaikeyī (2.97.6: *striyā niyuktaḥ kaikeyyā*); Pollock translates it as "under the constraint of a woman — Kaikeyī"; Bharata says that Daśaratha did so in order to please his wife (2.98.50: *striyāḥ priyacikūrṣuḥ*), Pollock translates it as in order to "please *a woman.*" Bharadvāja says that he had heard that Rāma was exiled by his father who was 'coerced by his wife' (2.84.12: *strīniyuktena*), Pollock translates the phrase as "acting under the orders of *a woman.*" The repeated translation of the word *strī* in the above instances as *'a woman'* instead of *'his wife'* robs Kaikeyī of her identity and presents her merely as a woman and is suggestive of sexual perversity and unmastered sexual desire on the part of the old king.

R P Goldman (1980,p. 162) had already said that Daśaratha put lust before polity and now the commentator Pollock slides into a whole torrent of abuse of Daśaratha, accusing him of 'sexual perversity', 'sexual excess' and 'unmastered sexual desire' which makes him capable of 'unspeakable deeds' (1986,p.15 n.15; p. 16, p. 58). He says that Daśaratha should be viewed as "one of several studies in calamitous passion . . . along with Rāvaṇa himself" (1986,p. 59); that "(Daśaratha) is not once shown to possess any awareness of the need to uphold righteousness" (1986,p. 60); that Daśaratha's "passion for Kaikeyī" led to "his flagrant violation of *dharma*'" (1986p. 346, n.10); and that "his sexual immoderation was rewarded with death (and) so too will be Rāvaṇa's" (1991,pp. 330–331).

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Blindly following Pollock, other American academics accuse Daśaratha of 'unmastered sexual desire' and of being corrupt like Rāvaṇa and call him an "exemplar of uncontrolled passion like Rāvaṇa" (R P Goldman and S J Goldman 1996, pp.72, 73–74& p. 74 n.291; Sally Sutherland2001, p. 227, p. 228 and similarly also 2003, p.154).

And none of the above commentators take into account that the *VR* describes Daśaratha as one who was virtuous (1.8.1: *dharmajña, mahātmā* ; 1.8.3: *dharmātmā*), who had conquered his senses (1.6.3: *vijitendriyaḥ*; 1.6.2: *vaśī* (who had his senses under control), a description of Daśaratha repeated in 2.10.1 as well as in 2.98.37 (and is used in 2.61.18 to describe disciplined ascetics for leading solitary life in the forest) we cannot accept Pollock's (*RV* 2) translation of this word in 2.10.1 as "gladly", although correctly translating the word in 2.61.18. The word is used in several verses to describe Rāma as one who had conquered his senses (1.1.8, 2.17.1, 3.14.28, 4.4.8).

The Rāmāyaṇa says that Daśaratha was "a royal seer like one of the great seers" (1.6.2: *maharṣikalpo rājarṣi*), virtuous, truthful and "as free from taint as the sky" (2.31.6: *satyavādī dharmātmā . . .* ākāśa *iva niṣpaṅko . . .*). The sage Vasiṣṭa, the royal priest, said that Daśaratha had acted "in the performance of righteousness" although it cost him his life (2.76.4). When Daśaratha died, he went to heaven and Lord Śiva himself praised his virtues (6.107.7–8). It was his righteousness that gained Daśaratha entry into heaven, for as Sumantra (2.46.44) said, only one who is of good conduct can enter heaven; the Rāmāyaṇa describes Daśaratha as shining in his glory in heaven (6.107.10). We see that from the beginning to the end, the Rāmāyaṇa showers only the highest praise on Daśaratha. One may see also the paragraph on "tags" discussed earlier.

The commentator Pollock's statements on Daśaratha in *RV 2* are in total contradiction to what the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa says. On the one hand, his comments are based on a pre–Vālmīkian text of the Rāmāyaṇa that he hypothesizes, although as R P Goldman (2003, p. 22) says, there is no evidence of an earlier version of the Rāma story ever having existed. On the other hand, Pollock dismisses the praise given in numerous places in

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the Rāmāyaṇa as merely formulaic or ironic or a part of the rehabilitation by a secondary redactor. He makes the futile claim (irrelevant to the study of Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa) that Vālmīki had altered the 'original' story of Daśaratha.

§2 The broad outline of the events described below are known to all. Bharata and Śatrughna had gone, with Bharata's uncle Yudhājit who had come to fetch them (2.1.2, 4), to far-away Rājagṛha, and they stayed there for quite a while, enjoying the warm hospitality of their uncle (2.1.6-7). Meanwhile, Rāma administered the kingdom following Daśaratha's orders (2.1.11-12). Observing that Rāma was carrying out his duties very well, and conscious of his own old age, Daśaratha wished to make him the Prince-Regent and himself retire from kingly duties (2.1.33).[4] In consultation with his *ministers*, he chose Rāma as the Prince-Regent (2.1.34: *niścitya sacivaiḥ sārdhaṃ Yuvarājām amanyata*).

He then convened a meeting of the assembly of the chief men and nobles of the kingdom; he told them that he was weary with old age (2.2.6) and wished to hand over the reins of the kingdom to Rāma and asked for their approval of his choice (2.2.8ff). The *assembly*, realizing the righteousness (*dharma*) and statecraft (*artha*) of the king (2.2.14-15) *gave its enthusiastic approval and urged Daśaratha to make Rāma the Prince-Regent without delay* (2.2.34: *kṣipram*).

Daśaratha noted that it was Caitra, an auspicious month, and asked Vasiṣṭa and others to make preparations for Rāma's consecration (2.3.4). He then called Rāma, and told him of his decision that he (Rāma) shall be consecrated as Prince-Regent on the auspicious day of Puṣya [of that month]. Puṣya is considered to be most auspicious, especially for events like marriages or consecration as king or prince-regent.

Then, sometime after everyone who had come for the assembly had left, King Daśaratha had further consultations with his counsellors (2.4.1).

4 Note that all references are to the Critical Edition (Baroda). Reference to the Southern recension is occasionally given, in square brackets. The symbol *RV* will stand for the multi-volume translation, with notes, comments and annotations etc., edited by R P Goldman *et al* (Princeton Univ. Press).

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The Rāmāyaṇa does not spell out what they told him; we have to surmise as to what happened at the meeting from what the king said to Rāma later. Apparently, one of the things the king learnt at the meeting was that the auspicious day of Puṣya was the very next day. For the Rāmāyaṇa says that after hearing his counsellors, the king was determined that Rāma should be consecrated on the next day itself, and he declared: "Tomorrow is Puṣya, and Rāma shall be consecrated tomorrow" (2.4.2). Apparently, he did not wish to wait for a whole month for the next Puṣya day to arrive.

Daśaratha, who had already told Rāma that he had been chosen to become the Prince–Regent, now sends for him again, to tell him that the consecration will take place the very next day. His words to Rāma give the reason for such early ceremony.

He said that he had had repeated dreams lately — inauspicious, ominous, dreadful dreams (2.4.17: *aśubhān svapnān dāruṇān*). He had consulted astrologers and learnt that his own birth star was obstructed by hostile planets (2.4.18) and that the dreams portended that a king was "about to die or meet with some dreadful misfortune" (2.4.19: *rājā vā mṛtyum āpnoti ghorāṃ vā āpadam ṛcchati*).

He was afraid that he was very near to the end of his life and he said that he wanted the consecration of Rāma as Prince–Regent to take place before he (Daśaratha) lost his senses and his mind (2.4.20: *tad yāvadeva me ceto na vimuhyati rāghava*). Then the king told Rāma of his decision to consecrate him as yuvarājā the very next day as it was the auspicious day of Puṣya (2.4.21–22). He then asked Rāma to observe the necessary vows and precautions that night in preparation for the ceremony the next day (2.4.23–24).

The verses 2.4.17–24 brings to a natural end the topic of Daśaratha's decision to consecrate Rāma: the king has said why and why the haste to have it performed on the very next day. (We note that he had been keen to have the consecration on a Puṣya day; the next day happened to be Puṣya; the Puṣya day after that will come only a month later.)

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Therefore, it is strange that after asking Rāma to prepare himself for the consecration, Daśaratha suddenly says that the *prāptakāla* for the consecration is during Bharata's absence (2.4.25–27). The word *prāptakāla* may be translated as the 'best time', or as the available slot of time, or as the destined time. But why is there this sudden mention of Bharata?

When Daśaratha mentioned Bharata's name, did he mean that Rāma's consecration should be held the next day itself, as scheduled, "*because* Bharata was away", or "*although* Bharata was away and could not be present at the ceremony?" Some critics, especially those who wish to portray Daśaratha in a bad light, say that Daśaratha was scheming to break a promise that they allege he had made many many years ago that Bharata will succeed him on the throne. They say so on the basis of their interpretation of verses 2.4.25–27 and 2.99.3. Let us first consider the verses 2.4.25–27:

viproṣitaś ca bharato yāvad eva purād itaḥ |
tāvad eva abhiṣekas te prāptakālo mato mama || *25* ||
kāmaṃ khalu satāṃ vṛtte bhrātā te bharataḥ sthitaḥ |
jyeṣṭhānuvartī dharmātmā sānukrośo jitendriyaḥ || *26* ||
kiṃ tu cittaṃ manuṣyāṇāṃ anityam iti me matiḥ |
satāṃ ca dharmanityānāṃ kṛtaśobhi ca rāghava || *27* ||

The *critics*, including the commentator Pollock say that Daśaratha meant that the time when Bharata is away is precisely the best time for Rāma's consecration (25); that *although* Bharata follow the ways of good men, is deferential to his elders and is righteous (26), still, man's mind is inconstant — even that of a good man — and therefore it is best to present such a man with an accomplished fact (*kṛtaśobhi*) (27).[5] Underlying the critics' stand is their theory that Daśaratha had long ago made a promise that Kaikeyī's son (Bharata) will succeed him on the

5 See e.g. Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2). His translation of the word *kṛtaśobhī* is open to serious criticism. The word *kṛtaśobhī* refers to the splendid nature, the praiseworthiness of an act; Pollock's translation of it as 'an accomplished act', a *fait accompli*, ignores the epithet 'śobhī 'in the word.

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throne, that Daśaratha remembered the promise[6] and was scheming to break that promise and consecrate Rāma as the yuvarājā by present Bharata with a *'fait accompli'* that he cannot challenge easily.[7] This is discussed further in §4.1 – §4.5.2 below, where the above mentioned basis of the critics' stand is challenged.

Meanwhile, returning to verses 2.4.25–27, we see that 2.4.25 can be interpreted differently too, as Daśaratha saying, "I think that it is destiny (*prāptakāla*) that your consecration should take place when Bharata is away (25). Bharata certainly defers to his elder brother and walks in the path of the good and virtuous and has conquered his senses (26). The human mind is fickle — so I think — but a virtuous person (like Bharata) will only praise a good deed (the consecration ceremony held in his absence) that has been done (*kṛtaśobhi*)" (27). The word *kṛtaśobhi* refers to the splendid nature, the praiseworthiness of an act; to translate it as 'an accomplished act', a fait accompli (as the commentator Pollock (1986) and some other critics do), is to ignore the epithet 'śobhi' in the word.

From what we have seen earlier, when Daśaratha talked about the human mind being fickle, he could not have been referring to the possibility of Bharata making a demand for the throne; Daśaratha was only exhibiting his fear of losing *his own mind and senses* and even his life very soon. Indeed, he had already referred to this fear when he told Rāma that he should get consecrated before he, Daśaratha, becomes confused and loses his senses (2.4.18–20).[8] When he wailed to Kaikeyī he described

6 See e.g. Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2 p. 27 and notes on 2.4.25 and 2.99.3), Sutherland (1992: p. 244). Some commentaries, written long before the CE was produced, also make similar comments; see for instance Govindarāja's and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa's commentaries on 2.4.25 and 2.99 [107].3.

7 This theory, espoused by Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2) is found in some medieval commentaries; see e.g. *Tilaka* of Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa: *"anyathā bharataḥ pratibadhnīyād iti bhāvaḥ"*. Commentators like Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa and Govindarāja claim that Daśaratha had promised at the time of marrying Kaikeyī that Bharata will be his successor, and that he now wanted to renege on the promise. They rely on 2.99.3 taken literally, and go on to say that promises made at the time of marriage can be broken! See their comments on 2.99.3.

8 See Maheśvara Tīrtha's commentary *Tattvadīpikā*, on verse 27.

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himself as *gatāyuṣa,* that is, one who had come to the end of his life (2.11.12), it was a widely held belief that a man becomes confused and loses his senses and mind as death approaches him. Bharata refers to this in verse 2.98.51: *antakāle hi bhūtāni muhyanti iti purāśrutiḥ.* Sītā also refers to it while condemning Rāvaṇa for abducting her (3.54.16).

§3.1 Bharata's absence had nothing to do with the urgency Daśaratha felt for Rāma's consecration. Telling Rāma that the consecration has to take place when Bharata was away, he probably merely "forestalled" a possible request from Rāma that the consecration be held after Bharata's return; for he, Rāma, would naturally have liked Bharata and Śatrughna to be present at the event. Daśaratha was apparently unwilling to admit to Rāma for a second time that he was mortally afraid that his death was imminent and of losing his senses, and so he gave another reason, ostensibly based on statecraft, that though Bharata was righteous and deferred to Rāma, "even the mind of a good person may be inconstant" (2.4.27)[9]. That is how some people interpret the verse. But that interpretation is not consistent with what Daśaratha said in the previous verse. He said Bharata had conquered his senses, that is, was not jealous, and always acted according to the wishes of elders (2.4.26: *satām vṛtte sthitaḥ; jyeṣṭhānuvartī dharmātmā sānukrośo jitendriyaḥ*).

As the Rāmāyaṇa says, the old king wanted to see Rāma as ruler of the land before he (Daśaratha) died (2.1.33). One cannot really claim[10] that Daśaratha wanted the consecration to take place the following day "lest Bharata have time to return and contest the succession". After all, as even Mantharā declared, it was universally recognized that only the eldest son of a king is chosen to succeed to the throne (2.8.15: . . . *jyeṣṭe hi* . . . rājyatantrāṇi parthivāḥ/*sthāpayanti* . . .); it certainly was the case with the Ikṣvāku family to which Daśaratha belonged, as the court priest

9 Here, we see the poet's technique of pointing to things that are to happen: here, Kaikeyī's change of heart regarding Rāma's consecration. The technique is seen again when Kausalyā, just before she learns of Daśaratha's promise to Kaikeyī, refers to him as one who is true to his promise (2.17.12: *satyapratijña*).

10 As Pollock (1986: *RV* vol. 2, p. 6) does, and as had been stated in some medieval commentaries by authors who however had only corrupted versions of the Rāmāyaṇa available to them.

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Vasiṣṭa pointed out (2.102.30); Bharata too declared, more than once, that that is the only proper rule of succession (2.73.7, 2.97.10); so did Mantharā (2.8.15).

It is unrealistic to suggest that Bharata might claim for himself the right of succession, if he was present when it is announced that Rāma was to be made the Yuvarājā. For, (1) there is absolutely no evidence that he ever wished to be Daśaratha's successor; (2) As we saw above, Bharata knew – even Mantharā did – that normally, kingship would always go to the eldest son, unless he was unfit for kingship – and Rāma was the king's eldest son; further, (3) Whoever is proposed for the kingship has to be approved not only by the king but also by his counsellors as well as by the assembly consisting of the nobles of the court, the chiefs of the cities and provinces and representatives of ordinary citizens of Ayodhyā – and the choice of Rāma as successor was enthusiastically received by them all; (4) When Rāma has been chosen with the enthusiastic approval of the assembly, Bharata can contest it only by force of arms; but this is impossible as is shown below.

The Rāmāyaṇa portrays Bharata as possessing many noble qualities, but it does not say anything about his prowess. On the other hand Rāma's prowess as a warrior is mentioned again and again in regard to incidents which took place even before the issue of his consecration came up: his successful encounter with Mārīca and Subāhu, the sage Viśvāmitra giving him many divine weapons, his breaking the bow in Janaka's court, the bows and inexhaustible quivers and arrows that Varuṇa had bestowed on Daśaratha, who in turn had given them as a gift to Rāma (2.28.12). He had also shown his prowess by killing the asura Timidhvaja's son in a battle, on account of which Brahmā had rewarded him with divine weapons (2.39.11). Thus, Rāma was a very great warrior and Bharata could be no match for him. In addition, Rāma's consecration had been approved by the king's ministers, by the assembly of nobles and counsellors, and by the public. There was no way Bharata could have mounted a struggle against Rāma even if he would want to.

§3.2 The commentator Pollock makes the absurd claim that "everybody in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* expects Bharata to mount a struggle for power",

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including Daśaratha, Kausalyā, Guha and the seer Bharadvāja.[11] It was seen above that the Rāmāyaṇa contains nothing to suggest that Daśaratha expected Bharata to mount a struggle for power. Kausalyā did tell Bharata, "You wanted the kingship, and here you have it . . . as a result of Kaikeyī's cruel deed" (2.69.6). But Kausalyā spoke those words when she was overcome by sorrow and had just been rendered unconscious by her anguish (2.69.5: . . . *duḥkhārtāṃ patitāṃ naṣṭacetanām* ||) and was lamenting, drowned in her many sorrows (2.69.12: . . . *vilapamānāṃ* . . . | . . . śokair bahubhir āvṛtām ||). Her harsh words to Daśaratha, uttered in the anguish of her grief should not be taken literally (See 2.56.11–13).[12] Regarding Guha, when he saw Bharata's army approaching, he thought of various possible reasons: "Perhaps to capture or kill us? Perhaps it is Bharata coming to kill Rāma? Perhaps Bharata is not ill-disposed to Rāma at all" (2.78.3–4, 8), and later he puts his doubts as a direct question to Bharata. This does not at all mean that he had expected Bharata to launch a struggle for power. In fact, the poet makes use of Kausalyā's words referred to above, and Guha's words too, in order to praise Bharata, just as he makes Bharadvāja say to Bharata that he hopes Bharata had not set out with intention to harm Rāma in order to enjoy his power, unchallenged (2.84.13). It is unfair of a commentator to zero in on those words of Bharadvāja and ignore his explanation immediately after Bharata protested his innocence, that he knew what was in Bharata's heart and only asked the question to hear the confirmation spelled out so that Bharata's fame be magnified (2.84.20: *apṛcchaṃ tvāṃ tava atyarthaṃ kīrtiṃ samabhivardhayan*). Bharadvāja was a rishi

11 See Pollock (1986: *RV* vol. 2 p. 16). He makes the absurd claim that a struggle for power "was the established pattern of behaviour" among brothers. The words "There is no brotherly love among heroes" quoted by him are the rākṣasa Prahasta's words to Rāvaṇa (in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*) and have no merit in discussing Bharata. The accepted norm and established pattern of behaviour is given rather by Sugrīva's eagerness to return the throne to Vālī (when the latter returned after killing Māyāvin) and to serve under hi and by Rāma's admonishment to Lakṣmaṇa: "How can a brother ever kill a brother?" (2.91.6: *kathaṃ nu putraḥ pitaram hanyuḥ kasyāṃcid āpadi | bhrātā vā bhrātaraṃ hanyāt saumitre prāṇam ātmanaḥ ||).*

12 2.56.11–12: Kausalyā says: *putraśokārtayā tat tu mayā kim api bhāṣitam* || śoko nāśayate dhairyaṃ śoko nāśayate śrutam | śoko nāśayate sarvaṃ n'āsti śokoasamo ripuḥ ||

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of the highest order. By virtue of his *tapas,* he knew all that happened to Rāma during his 14 years of exile (6.112.14: *sarvaṃ mamaitad viditaṃ tapasā dharmavatsāla*). The great rishi could divine not only things that had happened but also things that were yet to happen. We note also that he entertained most lavishly Bharata, his army and the vast numbers of people who accompanied him on his way to Citrakūṭa to persuade Rāma to return to Ayodhyā (2. *sarga* 85).

We see that the poet uses all three incidents (with Kausalyā, Guha and Bharadvāja) in order to emphasize to us, his audience, Bharata's nobility and affection for Rāma.

We see then that it could have been only because either Rāma had expressed the wish that Bharata could be present at the consecration, or because Daśaratha was forestalling the expression of such a wish and was unwilling to confess to Rāma for a second time that, he was afraid of imminent death or loss of his senses. We must note that he did not tell the assembly about his dreams and his fear of imminent death or calamity, but merely referred to being weary with age. We can see that it was because of his fear of imminent death that he did not wish to wait a whole month for the next Puṣya day. We must note that although Daśaratha's words in (2.4.26–27) can also be interpreted as saying that even the mind of a righteous man can be inconstant, they do not indicate that Daśaratha had at any time made any promise that Bharata shall be his successor. The words might very well be an instance of Vālmīkī's technique of using words that are cues or pointers to things yet to come. The comment in verse 27 that even the mind of a righteous person can be inconstant is borne out when we look at Kaikeyī's behaviour in *sarga* 7, where she enthusiastically welcomes the news of Rāma's impending consecration (2.7.29–31), and her behaviour in *sargas* 9–12 where she adamantly wants Rāma to be exiled and her son Bharata to be installed as the Yuvarājā.

§3.3 A point to note is that after his meeting with Rāma, the king whom the poet describes as "the sinless king" (2.10.3: *apāpaḥ*) went to see Kaikeyī as he wanted to give her "the good news" about the consecration (2.10.1: *priyam* ākhyātum), because he was very sure that Kaikeyī would

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receive the news with joy (as indeed she did when she first heard it). At the same time the poet also says that Daśaratha was full of extreme worry (2.10.5: *abhisantrastacetanaḥ*) — no doubt due to his fear caused by his dreams and the astrologers' verdict of impending death or other calamity.

§3.4 Let us again go over some facts. Bharata and Śatrughna had been gone for quite some days, and for all that, Daśaratha knew, they could be returning to Ayodhyā any moment. Also, Daśaratha had not thought of consecrating Rāma till quite some days, indeed, *some weeks* after Bharata and Śatrughna had left for Rājagṛha.[13] These points to the conclusion that the thought of consecrating Rāma without delay occurred to him only on account of the horrible dreams that he had experienced "lately" and "repeatedly" (2.4.17) and that of the astrologers' interpretation of his horoscope and of his dreams (2.4.18–19), which resulted in his mortal fear of imminent death. It is only natural that he did not want any delay in a successor being chosen. The Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly says that a delay in appointing a successor to a king who has died is dangerous for the kingdom.[14]

§4.1 Some critics (including the commentator Pollock) claim that Bharata had a legitimate claim to the throne[15] and that, desirous of

13 (a) It took Bharata seven or eight days to make the *hurried* journey back to Ayodhyā (2.66.8), after being asked to return in order to attend to "urgent business" (2.64.3). So we may assume that it must have taken him even more days to go from Ayodhyā to Rajagṛha. And he had stayed on there (2.1.7) for quite a few days, before the thought arose in Daśaratha's mind to consecrate Rāma as the Yuvarājā (2.1.29–30).
(b) The statement in R P Goldman and S J Goldman (2004: p. 81), that Bharata returned home, "alerted to the catastrophe at Ayodhyā through prophetic dreams" is not correct.

14 For instance: (i) Daśaratha died when all his four sons were away; the ministers then said that '*some* Ikṣvāku prince' should be consecrated king '*here and now* ' (2.61.7: *adyaiva*); (ii) on the very first day after the funeral services for Daśaratha were over, the deputies of the king requested Bharata to accept the kingdom "*this very day* " (2.73.3: *tvam adya bhava no rājā*); (iii) as Vālī lay dying, the monkeys urged Tārā to consecrate Aṅgada immediately, lest the kingdom be overrun by enemies; and Vālī himself asked Sugrīva to become the king at once, "this very day" (4.19.14–16 ; 4.22.5 : *adyaiva*).

15 See Govindarāja's comments on 2.10.5 and 2.99.3; and Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, pp. 6 – 27).

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handing over the kingship to Rāma, Daśaratha made the arrangements for getting Rāma consecrated as the Yuvarājā during Bharata's absence so that the latter, presented with a *fait accompli*, would not be able to mount an opposition.[16] The critics' claim rests really on one and only one verse: 2.99.3, where Rāma says to Bharata:

> *purā bhrātaḥ pitā naḥ sa mātaraṃ te samudvahan |*
> *mātāmahe samāśrauṣrauṣīd rājyaśulkam anuttamam ||*

that is, that at the time of marrying Kaikeyī, Daśaratha had promised his kingdom as rājyaśulka – that is, that Kaikeyī's son will succeed him as king.[17] The critics say that Daśaratha remembered his promise of rājyaśulka and schemed to get Rāma consecrated as the Yuvarājā during Bharata's absence from Ayodhyā.[18] We examine this claim below.

§4.2 There is nothing in the Rāmāyaṇa other than Rāma's words in 2.99.3 that even remotely suggests that Daśaratha had ever made a promise of rājyaśulka; and there is certainly nothing in the Rāmāyaṇa to indicate that Daśaratha ever remembered such a promise. Some critics attempt, by the use of idiosyncratic translations, to show that Mantharā's words in verse 2.8.23 points to the conclusion that Daśaratha had made such a promise.

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16 See Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 27). We shall see that Pollock is far from correct on this point, and that his remarks about Daśaratha are consistently condemnatory of him.

17 (a) See e.g. Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, pp. 12, 27–28); see also Govindarāja's commentary on 2.10.5.
(b) 2.99.3–6: *purā bhrātaḥ pitā naḥ sa mātaraṃ te samudvahan | mātāmahe samāśrauṣīt rājyaśulkam anuttamam || 3 || devāsure ca saṃgrāme jananyai tava pārthivaḥ | saṃprahṛṣṭo dadau rājā varam ārādhitaḥ prabhuḥ || 4 || tataḥ sā saṃpratiśrāvya tava mātā yaśasvinī | ayācata naraśreṣṭhaṃ dvau varau varavarṇinī || 5 || tava rājyaṃ naravyāghra mama pravrājanaṃ tathā | tacca rājā tathā tasyai niyuktaḥ pradadau varam || 6 ||* There is in fact no totally acceptable interpretation of 2.99.3. Pollock, along with Govindaraja and others, takes it literally. That would mean that Daśaratha deliberately broke his (alleged) promise and tried to consecrate Rāma as the yuvarājā. If we take 2.99.3 as a story invented by Rāma, it would imply that Rāma was saying that his father was not truthful. Rāma was apparently willing to invent the story in 2.99.3 in order to somehow console Bharata who was confused and grieving; and the story had the desired effect. Bharata ceased blaming himself and his parents. Pollock's translations of verses 2.8.23 and 3.45.7 are not really acceptable.

18 See Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 27), Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa and Govindarāja on 2.10.5 and 2.99.3.

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§4.3 We note that Mantharā tells Kaikeyī that Rāma's consecration will deny forever the possibility of Bharata ascending the throne (2.8.13), *but she does not say that Daśaratha had ever promised to make Bharata the king.* If Daśaratha had ever made such a promise, and if Mantharā knew about it, she would have dinned it into Kaikeyī's ears. Mantharā tells Kaikeyī that Daśaratha had offered her (Kaikeyī) two boons long, long ago, at the battle between the devas and the asuras (2.9.13, 21), *but she does not say that Daśaratha had ever promised that Bharata will succeed him to the throne.*

(Indeed, it is highly doubtful whether Daśaratha had years earlier made an offer of two boons to Kaikeyī as Mantharā alleged. Kaikeyī does not seem to have remembered the incident. Her face probably showed great disbelief and puzzlement at what Mantharā said, for Mantharā now added that it was Kaikeyī herself who had told her of the incident. Further, Mantharā's story is highly suspected when one takes into account the fact that it is extremely unusual that a young woman from a far–away country would have been the charioteer for King Daśaratha in a battle against asuras. Besides, we have seen that we cannot accept everything that Mantharā says.

This shows that it is incorrect to translate 2.8.23 as Mantharā telling Kaikeyī that that the kingdom by rights, belonged to Bharata. What Mantharā said was, "*If Bharata obtains the kingdom legally* (2.8.23: *yadi ced bharato dharmād rājyam avāpsyati*)." We note also that Mantharā asked Kaikeyī *to use her womanly wiles, to be aware of her power as a wedded wife* and to *sulk* till Daśaratha offers a boon and swears it too (2.9.16, 2.9.19: *budhyasva saubhāgyabalaṃ ātmanaḥ*), and *then* to ask Daśaratha to banish Rāma to the forest and consecrate Bharata as the Yuvarājā (2.9.22–23). That is exactly what Kaikeyī did; she did not say that the king had promised that her son would succeed him; she only repeated what Mantharā had said and told Daśaratha that he had once promised her two boons; and, by sulking, as advised by Mantharā, she tricked her loving husband to make a promise to grant whatever she wished for (2.10.11). When Daśaratha, who had become quite

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confused and bewildered, made the promise, Kaikeyī then demanded that Bharata be made the Yuvarājā and that Rāma be exiled to the forest (2.10.26–28). The point to note is that *neither Mantharā nor Kaikeyī nor Daśaratha* ever recalled any promise of "rājya–śulka" having been made at any time. If Daśaratha had indeed made such a promise when he married Kaikeyī, it is absolutely inconceivable that Mantharā would not have remembered it and that Kaikeyī too would not have remembered it (especially when she was about to demand that Bharata be made the Yuvarājā); and *if he had indeed made a promise of rājya*–śulka, Daśaratha for his part, being truthful and righteous (as the Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly describes him), would have fulfilled his promise, with the consent of his counsellors and of Rāma himself. We must note that the Rāmāyaṇa speaks very highly of Daśaratha's character, describing him as one who was truthful, devoted to righteousness, had conquered his senses, as one who pleased his subjects by his righteousness and whose character was free from blemish.[19] We have to bear in mind that what the epic itself says is of the greatest value, and of much greater value than what any personage in the epic itself might say.

§4.4.1 All this strongly suggests that a promise of rājya–śulka had not been made at all. Daśaratha's desire to make Rāma the prince regent

19 Vālmīki describes Daśaratha as a "a royal seer like one of the great seers" (1.6.2: *maharṣikalpo rājarṣis triṣu lokeṣu viśrutaḥ*), as one who had conquered his senses (1.6.3: *vijitendriyaḥ* ; 1.10.1: *vaśī*), as always adhering to truth, true to his vows, and as free from blemish (1.6.5: *satyābhisaṃdha;* 1.7.15: *anaghaḥ*), who pleased his subjects in accordance with righteousness" (1.7.16: *prajā dharmeṇa rañjayan*); who was wise and righteous (1.8.3: *dharmātmā*) ; 1.8.1: *dharmajña, mahātmā* and similarly in 1.8.3 ; 1.10.8: *dharmavit.* To give some instances from later *sargas*, the poet describes Daśaratha as "pure–hearted" (2.11.14: *viśuddhabhāvaḥ*), "righteous and majestic" (2.12.18: śrīmān ... *dhārmikaḥ*), "truthful and righteous lord of men, like the ocean in profundity and as free from taint as the sky" (2.31.6: *sa satyvādī dharmātmā gāmbhīryāt sāgaropamaḥ* | ākāśa iva niṣpanko narendraḥ), "righteous" (2.37.11: *dharmātmā*) and as "a man of noble vision" (2.58.57: *udāra–darśanaḥ*). After he died, Daśaratha entered heaven, which no man who had done an unrighteous act can enter, and Lord Siva himself praised him as glorious (6.107.7–8)
We have to bear in mind that what Vālmīki, the author of the epic, says is of the greatest value, and of much greater value than what any personage in the epic itself might say. This shows that even if we omit the *sargas* 1.1 to 2.10, as Pollock (1986: *RV,* vol. 2, p. 28) would like us to, his conclusions are wrong; the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* is consistent in its high praise of Daśaratha's character.

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is mentioned as early as *sarga* one (see 2.1.34), while the so-called promise of 'rājya-śulka' is mentioned suddenly ninety-eight *sargas* later, in 2.99.3. In that verse, Rāma tells Bharata that Daśaratha when he married Kaikeyī had promised her father that her son would succeed him as king of Ayodhyā. We are then faced with the question of what to make of Rāma's words in 2.99.3. This question is discussed below in great detail.

§4.4.2 Firstly, in regard to verse 2.99.3, (the only verse which speaks of 'rājya-śulka'), we stress that one should not jump to take the word 'rājya-śulka' as signifying 'bride-price' as some critics do. The term really means 'royal nuptial-gift'.[20] We recall that Vālmīki describes Daśaratha as a great archer (2.10.25: *maheṣvāsa*), who had the ability to shoot by the mere sound of the target (2.57.8:śabdavedhī) — ability that we may assume was of great value when, as an ally of the devas themselves, he fought against the asuras who were known to often make themselves invisible while waging battle. Kṣatriyas were expected to possess valour, not wealth in the form of lands or jewels. King Daśaratha, renowned as a great archer and a valorous kṣatriya warrior — the devas themselves had him as an ally in their battle against the asuras (2.9.9) — would certainly not have paid a 'bride-price' to obtain the hand of Kaikeyī by promising that her son will succeed him on the throne.[21] Indeed, he had no absolute right to choose his successor. (See §3.1 above, on how a successor to the throne is chosen.)

§4.4.3 More than once Rāma declares that it is paramount for him that his father's reputation for truthfulness shall remain unsullied. Even the citizens of Ayodhyā say that Rāma was going on exile in order to keep the truthfulness of his father's words (2.30.7: *n'ecchaty anṛtaṃ kartuṃ pitaram*). Indeed, as Rāma told his father Daśaratha, "It is not

20 Even the dictionaries give this meaning. For instance, *rājya* = royal (Monier-Williams Dictionary) and śulka = nuptial present; present given by the bridegroom to his bride (Apte: Sanskrit-English Dictionary).

21 However, when Daśaratha accepted Kaikeyī as one of his Queens, people might have assumed that her son would become his successor since the senior Queens Kausalyā and Sumitrā had no sons at that time.

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the kingdom, nor comfort nor even Sītā that I desire, but that you remain truthful and not false".[22] As he tells Bharata, he is keen that his father's words should not become false (2.99.19: *catvāras tanayavarā vayaṃ narendraṃ satyasthaṃ bharata carāma*). Indeed, in order to maintain the truthfulness of his father's words, Rāma readily agreed to go on exile, as Kaikeyī had demanded as boon from Daśaratha.

If Rāma had known that Daśaratha had ever made a promise that Kaikeyī's son would succeed him on the throne, then in order that his father's words be truthful, Rāma should have, and would have, excused himself and not have agreed to be made the Yuvarājā. But Rāma did not do so. We have to conclude therefore that when the high drama was taking place in Ayodhyā, Rāma was not aware of any such promise made by Daśaratha at the time he married Kaikeyī.

We note also that Rāma, in his arguments with Kausalyā who was urging him not to go on exile, *did not claim* that Daśaratha had long ago promised that Kaikeyī's son will succeed him as the king (2.*sargas* 18–21), and this in spite of the fact that one of Kausalyā's first remarks was that Daśaratha was one who keeps his promises (2.17.12: *satyapratijña*). Similarly, in his arguments with Lakṣmaṇa who was also urging him not to go on exile, Rāma *did not claim* that Daśaratha had long ago promised that Kaikeyī's son will succeed him as the king, even though he emphasized the king's truthfulness, calling him "a truthful man, true to his word" (2.19.7).[23] Further, Rāma tells Sītā that Kaikeyī had been granted two boons long ago by Daśaratha, "a man true to his promise" (2.23.20: *satyapratijñena*), and that (as per the boons asked for by Kaikeyī) the king was "compelled by righteousness" to banish him and appoint Bharata as the Yuvarājā (2.23.21–22). He did not say anything about any promise by Daśaratha to Kaikeyī's father.

The arguments presented above show that when Rāma was in Ayodhyā he was not aware of any promise of any rājyaśulka by Daśaratha when

22 Rāma says: 2.31.32: *naivāhaṃ rājyam icchāmi na sukhaṃ na ca maithilīṃ | tvām ahaṃ satyam icchāmi nānṛtaṃ puruṣarṣabha* || similarly in 2.31.36.

23 2.19.7: *satyaḥ satyābhisaṃdhaś ca nityam satyaparākramaḥ |*

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he [Daśaratha] married Kaikeyī. The Rāmāyaṇa gives no clue as to how, when Bharata met him in Citrakūṭa, Rāma could have suddenly come to know of such a promise of the kingdom as 'rājya–śulka' — a promise that neither Daśaratha nor Mantharā nor Kaikeyī seem to have ever remembered. The only conclusion we are led to is that *we cannot take Rāma's words in verse 2.99.3 as literally true.*

§4.5.1 But one may ask, "How can ever–truthful Rāma, described right at the beginning as *satyavākya* (1.1.2), utter words that are not true?" The answer is as follows. One should not utter words that are not literally true if their purpose is to reap some benefit for oneself; but one may utter words that are not literally true if their purpose is to save somebody's life, or to save somebody from sorrow. We have a powerful example involving Rāma himself. As Sumantra was setting out for the forest from Ayodhyā with Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, anguished Daśaratha cried out to Sumantra to tarry a while, but Rāma asked Sumantra to keep going (2.35.33: *tiṣṭheti rājā cukrośa, yāhi yāhīti rāghavaḥ*) and said to Sumantra: "You can tell the king that you did not hear him" (2.35.34). That is, Rāma was asking him to utter words that were not true. Rāma explains the situation, saying: *"To prolong sorrow is the worst thing of all"*[24] (2.35.34). That is, one should try to lessen a person's sorrow and to put an end to it, and one may utter an untruth in order to achieve that purpose.

Consider now the context in which Rāma uttered the words in verse 2.99.3. Bharata, when he met Rāma in Citrakūṭa, railed against his father Daśaratha and his mother Kaikeyī, accusing them of acting unrighteously, sending Rāma on exile and making him, Bharata, the ruler of the kingdom (2.97.5, 7). He was overwhelmed by anger against his parents, and by grief and feelings of guilt at having become the ruler of the land. Rāma tried to soothe Bharata; he assured him that he found no fault in him (2.97.17) and that both Daśaratha and Kaikeyī were righteous persons (2.97.19); but Bharata was not fully pacified and continued to

24 2.35.34: *nāśrauṣam iti rājānaṃ upālabdho 'pi vakṣyasi | ciraṃ duḥkhasya pāpiṣṭham iti rāmas tam abravīt ||*

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lament (2.98.14). Rāma again tried to comfort him (2.98.14 ff.),[25] but Bharata continued to be racked by pain and sorrow (98.46 ff.). Moved by compassion for him and in order to put an end to his feelings of guilt, sorrow and anger towards his parents, Rāma said to Bharata words which were not literally true: he told Bharata that Daśaratha had long ago, at the time he wed Kaikeyī, promised that her son would succeed him on the throne (2.99.3); Rama concluded with the words "Do not feel sorrow and despair" (2.99.19: *mā viṣādam*). Rāma's words were meant to console Bharata; indeed the entire *sarga* is devoted to Rāma's attempt to console Bharata; there had been in reality no promise of rajya–śulka made by Daśaratha. Note that in the very next verse, which begins *sarga* 100, the poet summarizes *sarga* 99 and says that Jābāli addressed "Rāma who was consoling Bharata" (2.100.1: āśvāsayantaṃ bharatam ... *rāmam*).

The story of Daśaratha's promise of rājya–śulka, a story which would justify Kaikeyī's demand and Daśaratha's acquiescence to it, seems to have been invented by Rāma out of compassion for Bharata purely in order to put a speedy end to the latter's anguish and sorrow and feelings of guilt, because his earlier attempts to console him had been unsuccessful. The words uttered by Rāma were not true, but he always held – as he used to tell Sītā – that showing compassion is the highest righteousness and duty (5.36.34: ānṛśaṃsyam paro dharmaḥ).

§4.5.2 There are other, similar instances in the Rāmāyaṇa. To mention only one briefly: Hanumān told Sītā, "There is none among Sugrīva's army of monkeys who is not superior or equal to me; after all, it is not the best who gets sent forth on an errand. If even I could reach here, those mighty monkeys can also do so quite easily [leaping across the ocean]" (5.37.37–38). But Hanumān knew that none of the other monkeys except Aṅgada was capable of leaping over the ocean and reaching Laṅkā, and that Aṅgada had been diffident about his ability to achieve

25 Rāma tells Bharata: "Do not grieve" (2.98.37: *mā śoco*). Bharata says: 2.98.47: *dharmabandhena baddho 'smi tenemāṃ neha mātaram | hanmi tīvreṇa daṇḍena daṇḍārhāṃ pāpakāriṇīm* || 2.98.50: *ko hi dharmārthayor hīnam īdṛśaṃ karma kilbiṣam | striyaḥ priyacikūrṣuḥ san kuryād dharmajña dharmavit* ||

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the return leap (4.64.19, 5.28.33). How could he then make such an untruthful statement to Sītā? The answer is found in the words he said to Sītā immediately afterwards. Vālmīki says that Hanumān comforted Sītā saying: "So, enough of this anguish and misery! Give up your grief! The monkey captains will reach Laṅkā in one bound!" (5.37.39). Take heart . . . you will soon see your sorrows ended" (5.37.45).[26] Hanumān continued to comfort her saying, "Please, don't give way to weeping, don't feel sorrow." (5.37.51) and Sītā felt refreshed, "like the earth with half–ripe crops on receiving a shower" (5.38.2).

We can now see that it was in order to *lift Sītā out of her sorrow* that Hanumān told Sītā that all the monkeys were superior to him and could cross the ocean easily — statements that are not truthful. Hanumān's words belong in the same class as Rāma's words (discussed earlier) to Sumantra and to Bharata, respectively.

§5.1.1 Some critics claim that Daśaratha had not mastered his sexual desires[27] and that he gave Kaikeyī the boon due to his infatuation for

26 5.37.37–39: Hanumān says to Sītā: *mattaḥ pratyavaraḥ kaś cinnāsti sugrīvasaṃnidhau || ahaṃ tāvad iha prāptaḥ kiṃ punas te mahābalāḥ | na hi prakṛṣṭāḥ preṣyante preṣyante hītare janāḥ || tad alaṃ paritāpena devi śoko vyapaitu te | ekotpātena te laṅkāṃ eṣyanti hariyūthapāḥ* || 5.37.45: *kṣipraṃ devi śokasya pāraṃ yāsyasi maithili* |

27 I have in mind Indian critics like K S R Sastri, who wrote twenty or more years *before* the CE was produced, and who relied on the corrupted recensions which alone were available at that time and which easily led to the misunderstanding of many verses. I have in mind also modern western commentators like Pollock, writing twenty or more years *after* the CE was produced and claiming to write on the basis of the CE. Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2), and some other critics, seem to be obsessed with the idea that Daśaratha was guilty of sexual excess. In footnote no.15, on p. 15, Pollock speaks of "the 'sexual' perversity of Rāma's foils, Vālī, Rāvaṇa, and Daśaratha himself . . . ."; on the next page he piles a lot of abuse on Daśaratha, saying that, "like Rāvaṇa", Daśaratha "has erred through 'sexual' immoderation" and says "Rāma himself is dispossessed and driven from his country through a tyrant's unrighteous conduct (resulting from 'sexual excess')." Later he claims, on the basis of his translation of 2.10.25, a translation that is shown to be erroneous, that the verse itself says of Daśaratha that "in his mad passion [he] had granted [Kaikeyī] a boon" (p. 27), and, saying that Daśaratha "is weak, tyrannical and reckless" due to his "unmastered sexual desire" (p. 58), Pollock repeats his gross accusation and adds that "Daśaratha, in fact, should be viewed as one of several studies in calamitous passion, along with Vālī and Rāvaṇa" (p. 59). Pollock (1991: *RV*, 3, pp. 330–331) again accuses Daśaratha of 'sexual immoderation'. Sally J Sutherland (2001: p. 227) echoes Pollock and attributes "insufficient containment of desire" in equal measure to Daśaratha and

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her, on the basis of which she demanded that Rāma be sent into exile and that her son Bharata be consecrated as Prince–Regent instead of Rāma. Let us first look at what seems to have influenced their opinion on the question.

§5.1.2 Sometimes critics give incorrect (or even biased) translation of passages in the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa and then argue on the basis of their translation. For instance, the commentator Pollock translates verse 2.10.5: *parimṛśya ca pāṇibhyām abhisaṃtrastacetanaḥ | kāmī kamalapatrākṣīm uvāca vanitām idam* || as follows: "And, as he caressed his lotus–eyed wife with his hands, sick with worry and desire, he said to her . . ."[28] It is far better to translate the verse as follows: *"Stroking her with his hands, the affectionate and generous king, his mind gripped by terrible fear, said to his beloved lotus–eyed wife as follows."* (He was gripped with the fear of imminent death.)

It is misleading to say (as Pollock does in his translation of 2.10.5) that Daśaratha was 'sick with desire'. As the poet tells us, Daśaratha who knew that Rāma loved Kaikeyī like his own mother (2.10.34) (and must have also known of her affection for Rāma) went to see her, with joy in his heart, to give her the good news (2.10.1: *priyam ākhyātum*) of the impending consecration of Rāma as the Yuvarājā. Daśaratha was old and weary, and at the moment in question was haunted by the fear of imminent death. When the king saw Kaikeyī, he knew that she was sulking and in a tantrum. In order to lift her out of her sulking mood, he gently and affectionately touched her (2.10.5), calling her "my precious", "lovely" etc. Probably because the poet uses the word *kāmī* at this point to describe Daśaratha, the commentator Pollock's translation of (2.10.5) claims that Daśaratha went to see Kaikeyī due to (sexual) desire; but Vālmīki introduces the scene with the description of Daśaratha as one who was self–controlled and who had conquered his senses (2.10.1:*vaśī*).

Rāvaṇa! On p. 228, she says: "Like Daśaratha, [Rāvaṇa] is willing to cede control of all his possessions to fulfil his desire." See also note 36 below for similar, earlier statements by R P Goldman.

28 See Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 102).

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(Pollock's translation of the word as "gladly" is totally unacceptable.)[29] Further, the primary meaning of the word '*kāma*' (from which the word *kāmī* is derived, is simply any wish or desire, and it denotes also love and affection (see M–W. Dictionary: Sexual love is mentioned last as a meaning). The word can denote lust, but more often it denotes just love, affection as well as generosity – as one who grants one's desires; the word is applied to describe Lord Viṣṇu in this sense. (Perhaps the Rāmāyaṇa describes Daśaratha at this point as a *kāmi* – a wish granter–, in a sense foretelling his grant of boon to Kaikeyī.) Daśaratha asks Kaikeyī as to why she was sulking (2.10.6–8); apparently, he did not have the least suspicion that her sulking had anything to do with the consecration of Rāma; for he tells her that every wish of hers will be satisfied even if it cost him his life (2.10.11–12). It is in this context that he says: *"Is there some guilty man who should be freed, or some innocent man I should execute?"* (2.10.10)

Of course, queens were not interested, nor did they play any part, in the day–to–day affairs of the kingdom. Daśaratha's statement above is therefore only hyperbole, akin to asking a sulking child: "What is it that you want? Do you want a horse with wings? Or do you want me to get the moon for you?", for the questioner knows that the answer will be a "no!"; the child will be assured however that he/she is loved, and will talk, and come out of the sulking mood; and when Daśaratha said to Kaikeyī: "I promise that I will do whatever will make you happy" (2.10.19: *kariṣyāmi tava prītim sukṛtenāpi śape*), he did not in the least expect that Kaikeyī would ask for anything atrocious. It would be quite wrong to take 2.10.10 in a word–for–word literal sense and accuse Daśaratha of making an enormously reprehensible offer to Kaikeyī due to his "unmastered sexual desire";[30] the last part (about sexual desire) flowing from the flawed understanding of the word *kāmī* in 2.10.5.[31]

29 One cannot accept Pollock's translation of the word *vaśī* as 'gladly'. In 2.61.18, the word is used to denote ascetics. Note that Daśaratha is described elsewhere too as one who had conquered his senses, that is, his passions (for instance 1.6.3: *vijitendriyaḥ*).

30 Wurm (1976: p. 325) and Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 58) make the accusation.

31 The word *kāma* means not only 'desire', but also simply 'love, affection, or wish'. In the context in question, the old and aged king Daśaratha was greatly worried about his imminent death and was not likely to have been interested in amorous activity.

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§5.1.3 The error in Pollock's interpretation of 2.10.5 can be seen if one notices that in the previous verse 2.10.4 the poet compares Daśaratha's action to that of a bull elephant caressing his mate wounded by a poisoned arrow. Neither verse is even remotely suggestive of any 'sexual desire', nor of any erotic favour sought or denied.[32] (Some western academics who refer to Daśaratha's action as resembling that of a bull elephant caressing his mate seem to deliberately ignore that the elephant's mate is described as having been wounded by a poisoned arrow: 2.10.4: *digdhena viddhām . . . mahāgaja iva*). The Rāmāyaṇa in fact is referring at this point to the fact that Kaikeyī, Daśaratha's mate, had been "wounded" by the poisonous advice given by Mantharā.

§5.2 The following line from verse 2.10.25 can also be easily misunderstood: *tataḥ param uvācedaṃ varadaṃ kāmamohitam.* [33] Here too, the word *kāma* should not be taken to mean sexual love and the word *kāmamohita* as denoting one afflicted by 'mad passion'. A proper translation of the word *'kāmamohita'* here would be: *'one who was confused by love and affection'*.[34] In the case in question, we must

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Unable to understand the context and correct sense in which 2.10.10 should be understood, Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, pp. 58, 59) says that Daśaratha's sexual desire makes him capable of "unspeakable deeds" and that "Daśaratha should be viewed as one of several studies in calamitous passion, along with Vālī and Rāvaṇa himself."

32 In support of his erroneous assertion, Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 58) discards what Vālmīki himself has said of Daśaratha in earlier chapters (1.1 to 2.9) — and in later chapters too! And uses questionable translations and interpretations of 2.10.5, 2.10.10 and 2.10.25.

33 Whereas Vālmīki repeatedly and consistently praises Daśaratha, Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2) has only words of condemnation of the king. We are reminded of R. P. Goldman's observation that western scholars have little empathy, if at all, for characters like the Buddha and Rāma. Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 102) in his translation says, erroneously, that Daśaratha was "sick with worry and desire". He takes *kāma* to denote sexual desire; in fact, it might mean simply *'affection'*; and the word *moha* may denote either infatuation, or confusion. See also the next note.

34 Apte's *Practical Sanskrit–English Dictionary* says: *kāmaḥ* = affection, love; also: desire of carnal gratification; *moha* = confusion. See e.g. the word *'buddhimohena'* used in 4.22.3. Hence, *kāmamohita* = 'influenced or confused by love'. Daśaratha had nothing but affection for Kaikeyī and was no doubt confused by her antics and statements.
In his translation of 2.10.25, Pollock says, erroneously, that Daśaratha "in his mad passion had granted her a boon". Translators sometimes make mistakes and other errors; for instance, Pollock mistranslates the word *deva* in 2.14.11:"*kausalyā suprabhā deva pitā tvam draṣṭum icchati* "(perhaps it should read: "*kausalyāsuprajā*

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remember that Daśaratha was very old, and fearful of his imminent death, that he is described as a *vaśī* and *vijitendriyaḥ*, that is, one who was in full control of himself, having conquered his senses and therefore not likely to have been having sexual thoughts.[35]

§5.3.1 Also misunderstood by many are verses 2.47.8–10 and especially verse 2.47.13 where Rāma says: *arthadharmau parityajya yaḥ kāmam anuvartate | evam āpadyate kṣipraṃ rājā daśaratho yathā* || that is, "Whoever forsakes righteousness and statecraft and follows the urgings of desire will soon come to grief, just like King Daśaratha." Taken by itself, Rāma's utterance looks like a serious accusation that Daśaratha was overcome by unmastered sexual passion for Kaikeyī.[36]

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deva pitā tvām draṣṭum icchati"). He mistranslates the phrase as "O god, worthy son of Kausalyā ...your father wish[es] to see you." He mistranslates the word *deva* in 2.2.32, 34, 2.39.16, 2.59.13, 2.60.19 and perhaps elsewhere also. It is not surprising that translators often misunderstand the text.

35 Misunderstanding the line has probably resulted in certain passages found in the Southern recension and that describe Daśaratha as afflicted by sexual passion; these verses have been omitted by the CE as spurious. See e.g. CE 2.187*, line 13, 2.196* and 2.199*; (in the Southern Recension, verse [2.10.17] describes Daśaratha as *'kāmabalasaṃyukta'* and [2.11.1] describes him as *'manmathaśarair viddha'*) Especially South Indian scholars like K S R Sastri, depending on the Southern recension which contains these and more spurious verses, and commenting several years before the CE had been produced, were misled by the passages that we now know to be spurious. We must note also that the word *kāma* means also 'affection', and Manmatha's arrows kindle pure affection, as well as sexual desire.

36 Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 60) goes so far as to hail it as "perhaps the most important gnomic utterance of the book" and that there cannot be a greater condemnation of Daśaratha as overcome by unmastered sexual passion for Kaikeyī. Pollock (1991: *RV*, vol. 3, p. 331) again accuses Daśaratha of sexual immoderation. R P Goldman (1980: p.156; p.162) had made similar criticisms even earlier; he repeatedly refers to 2.47.8–10 on the basis of his interpretation of which he says that "the old king [Daśaratha] himself was guilty of the charge of putting lust before polity".
Pollock claims (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 61) that 2.57.6–7 show that Daśaratha recognized "the weakness and imprudence that led him to spurn Kausalyā and come under Kaikeyī's power". But Pollock's own note on p. 432 suggests that he was not sure of his interpretation of the verses.
Similar accusations of Daśaratha have been made also by K S R Sastri (1944: Part 1, p. 65), Wurm (1976: pp. 302, 325), R P Goldman (2004: p. 38) and others. Note that Sastri's statement was made about 20 years *before* the CE was prepared and he was relying on the southern recension, which has some spurious verses.

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Was Daśaratha really tricked through infatuation for one of his wives, Kaikeyī, and was the old king guilty of the charge of putting lust before polity? [37]

§5.3.2 But let us examine Rāma's words in verse 2.47.13 closely. We have to take into account three factors: one, that they are only the words of a character in the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa and rank lower in Vālīdity than the words of the poet himself; two, the context of Rāma uttering those words; three, whether the words should be taken seriously, or disregarded. We shall see that Rāma's remarks about Daśaratha in that verse, as well as his remarks in his lamentation about Bharata and others in (2.47.7, 11 and 15) should not be taken as his true and sober thoughts or Vālīd conclusions. For, we note that the Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly speaks highly of Daśaratha's character.[38] We have to examine whether Rāma was perhaps saying those things with a certain purpose in mind. We shall do this below.

§5.3.3 In his reference to Daśaratha immediately prior to *sarga* 2.47, Rāma describes Daśaratha as a *mahātmā* (2.46.17) who had conquered his senses (2.46.20: *jitendriya*) and was a virtuous person (2.46.52: *dhārmika*). This was just before Rāma (and Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā) crossed

37 As Goldman (1980: pp. 156, 162) says. But in (1984: *RV* vol. 1, pp. 6–8) he says that the "the wise and powerful Daśaratha" was "constrained by his rigid devotion to his given word"; later however, R P Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman (1996: *RV* vol. 5, p. 51 fn. 174; pp. 71–72; 73; see also pp. 73–74 and fn. 291) revert to accusing Daśaratha of lust and are content to merely repeat Pollock's accusations of the king, accusations that are quite contrary to R P Goldman's earlier observation in vol. 1. Sally Goldman (2001: pp. 227–228) says that Daśaratha's "downfall" stemmed from his "insufficient containment of his desire" and that he was "willing to cede control of all his possessions to fulfil his desire". Again, Goldman (2004: p. 34) says: "[Kaikeyī] coerces the infatuated king [Daśaratha] initially by sulking and withholding sexual favours, bending him to her will ...", and that it was the king's fatal flaw that he allowed himself to fall under the sensual power of Kaikeyī (p. 38); but there is no question of the queen withholding any sexual favours when none was asked of her. R P Goldman and S J Goldman (2004: p. 79) repeat the claim that Kaikeyī took advantage of what they call "the sexual thraldom of the aged king", that is, they claim that Daśaratha was a slave to sexual passion for Kaikeyī; R P Goldman (2004: p. 38) also makes a similar claim; the claim however, is not supported by the Rāmāyaṇa.

38 We see that even if we omit the earlier *sargas*, as Pollock would like us to, his conclusions are wrong.

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the river Gangā. Just a few hours later, after performing the evening *sandhyā–vandana* prayers, all three of them lay down under a tree. It was the *first night* that they were alone and outside the kingdom of Ayodhyā (2.47.2). Rāma started to converse with Lakṣmaṇa and made his next remark about Daśaratha. Rāma's mind wandered to wild thoughts; he even laments that Kaikeyī might kill Daśaratha (2.47.7).

{We should note that on a previous occasion when he was alone with Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma had said to him: "I look upon all our mothers with equal affection; Kaikeyī too looked upon me and Bharata with equal affection" (2.19.15). Later too, when, in Daṇḍakāraṇya forest, Lakṣmaṇa spoke harshly of Kaikeyī, Rāma admonished him saying that he should not speak ill of Kaikeyī (3.15.35). Therefore, there must be an explanation as to why Rāma now thinks – or says – that Kaikeyī might even kill her husband. }

Rāma not only lamented that Kaikeyī might kill Daśaratha, but he spoke harsh words about Daśaratha too. His *immediately previous* remark about Daśaratha is in *sarga* 46 and says that the king is a *righteous* person (2.46.52: *dhārmika*); the remark was made just before Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā crossed the Ganga and reached its southern shore; Rāma's next remark about the king was made very soon after, *on the same day*, a few hours later, he says that Daśaratha is a *kāmātmā (2.47.8);* that because of his desire for Kaikeyī, Daśaratha had come completely under her power *and had forsaken righteousness* (2.47.8–9, 13). Such a sudden reversal of opinion is remarkable and calls for an explanation — for *everywhere else* in the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, before and after this *sarga* 47, numerous times, Rāma has referred to Daśaratha as most righteous.[39] We recall that Rāma, when he was calm and sober, had told Lakṣmaṇa about how he came to be exiled: *"This command of our father is based on*

39 Wurm (1976: p. 327) says that "the picture of Rāma emerging in this *sarga* is an exceptional picture of its kind"; and Brockington (1984: p. 330) says: "*sarga* 47 (Rāma's lament) is peripheral and may well be an interpolation; it is not attested in either of the summaries in the Bālakāṇḍa (*sargas* 1 and 3), or in the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*Mbh.* 3.258–76), while the pessimism attributed here to Rāma is out of character with the usual portrayal of him."

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righteousness" (2.18.33); he had referred to Daśaratha as "a truthful man, true to his word, ever striving for truth" (2.19.7: *satyaḥ satyābhisaṃdaś ca nityaṃ satyaparākramaḥ*), and as *"dhārmika"*(virtuous) even as late as in 2.46.52. (Elsewhere too in the VR, Daśaratha is highly praised as truthful and righteous.)

§5.3.4 Rāma said that Kaikeyī never differentiated between her son Bharata and him (2.19.15) — which is quite true, as we know from Kaikeyī's own words to Mantharā (2.7.30: *rāme vā bharate vā aham viśeṣam nopalakṣaye*); Rāma said also that Kaikeyī was "good-natured and virtuous" (2.19.17) and that he would blame only fate and not her for what had happened (2.19.22). He reiterates these opinions when Bharata met him in Citrakūṭa: he said that it is impossible for one such as Bharata ever to do evil for the sake of kingship, that Bharata should not, like a child, reproach Kaikeyī, and that both Daśaratha and Kaikeyī are righteous people (2.97.19). It is to be noted that he repeatedly refers to Daśaratha (2.97.19, 22). These sober remarks of Rāma show that things are gravely wrong with the alleged musings of Rāma in *sarga* 2.47, or, that he did not really mean what he said.

§5.4.1 In regard to Rāma's words in verse 2.47.13, it is important that one should not ignore the context of the verse.[40] *Sarga* 47 describes the first night that Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā were alone and outside the kingdom of Ayodhyā (2.47.2). The *sarga* presents Rāma as afflicted by feelings that an 'ordinary' (*prākṛta*: ordinary, uncultured) man would have. Vālmīki many a time presents Rāma as exhibiting the failings of an 'ordinary' person. In the *sarga*, Rāma's mind wanders to wild thoughts: for instance, he laments that Kaikeyī may kill Daśaratha (2.47.7), that Bharata and his wife must be joyful that he had been exiled (2.47.11), and that Kaikeyī may be persecuting Kausalyā and Sumitrā (2.47.15). His utterances are all, quite contrary to what he had said earlier (as seen in the paragraph above). The Rāmāyaṇa says that Rāma uttered *"such and many other pitiful words of lamentation"* that first night Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa

40 Pollock (1986: *RV*, vol. 2, p. 60) cites the verse, but ignores the context and misunderstands the verse.

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and Sītā were alone "in that desolate place" [in the forest] (2.47.27). As Rāma kept lamenting, *Lakṣmaṇa asked him to stop tormenting himself* (2.47.30). Thus, we see that the words in question (verse 2.47.13) were uttered by Rāma *when his mind was greatly tormented.*

§5.4.2 There are two ways of approaching the question as to what one is to make of Rāma's words in 2.47.13, whether they should be taken as a serious utterance by him, or should be disregarded.

(1) An answer is provided by the Kausalyā Principle — Kausalyā's words to Daśaratha in regard to her harsh accusations of the king in 2.55.16–20. She said that *one should disregard things uttered in the anguish of grief* (2.56.11–13).[41]

The explanation for Rāma's words in 2.47.13 and for the words in other verses too in that *sarga* of lamentation by Rāma, is indeed that the words were uttered by Rāma when his mind was tortured by unhappiness, and therefore (by the Kausalyā Principle) should not be confused for sober judgment.

(2) *Another way of looking at Rāma's words in 2.47.13:* As some commentators have recognized, in verses 2.47.7–12, Rāma was probably only playing upon Lakṣmaṇa's own fears and hoping to convince him to return to Ayodhyā. For, after saying harsh words about Daśaratha, Kaikeyī and Bharata, Rāma immediately says to Lakṣmaṇa: "Kaikeyī may be persecuting Kausalyā and Sumitrā because of me. You must go back to Ayodhyā tomorrow morning itself" (2.47.15–16);[42] this is quite strange, in view of what he had said earlier, as seen in §5.3.4 above.

Thus, we see from (1) and (2) above, that we should not take Rāma's words in 2.47.7–15 as really reflecting his feelings.

41 2.56.12: śoko nāśayate dhairyaṃ śoko nāśayate śrutam | śoko nāśayate sarvaṃ nāsti śokasamo ripuḥ ||

42 See for instance Pollock (*RV*, vol. 2, p. 56 n.6 and p. 412). It is therefore strange that Pollock takes verse 13 literally and calls it "perhaps the most important — gnomic utterance of the book"!

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§6 Thus in particular, it would be quite incorrect to conclude from verse 2.47.13 that Daśaratha was a tyrant, or a slave to his 'unmastered' sexual passion for Kaikeyī. Further, we must note that when Kaikeyī would not withdraw her boons, Daśaratha called her an evil woman and repeatedly repudiated her completely, and repudiated her son Bharata too if he accepted the kingship (2.12.11; 2.37.6–9).

§7.1 We have a similar situation in *sarga* 28. Some critics claim that verse 2.28.7 shows that Kausalyā was superseded when Kaikeyī arrived;[43] the claim is simply absurd. In that verse, Lakṣmaṇa says: "The noble Kausalyā could support a thousand men like me, for she has acquired a thousand villages as her living (*upajīvanam*)." [44] Because the word *upajīvanam* is used, the critics argue that when Daśaratha married Kaikeyī, Kausalyā was superseded and given a thousand villages for subsistence. But the critics do not say whether Kausalyā felt spurned or was "superseded" when Daśaratha married Sumitrā. Nor do they say whether Sumitrā too felt "superseded" when Kaikeyī arrived. *One can understand the verse 2.28.7 properly only if the context is taken into account.* Verse 2.28.1 says that Lakṣmaṇa stood before Rāma, begging to be allowed to accompany him to the forest. In verses 2.28.2–4, Rāma is trying to suggest to Lakṣmaṇa to remain in Ayodhyā and not ask for permission to accompany him into exile; without making the suggestion explicitly, he asks Lakṣmaṇa, "If you were to come with me to the forest, who would support Kausalyā and glorious Sumitrā?" (2.28.2). Perhaps Rāma is also at the same time cleverly testing Lakṣmaṇa's true desires, and giving him an honourable excuse to stay back in Ayodhyā and not accompany him to a life of exile in the forest. In verses 2.28.6–7, Lakṣmaṇa gives a clever answer to Rāma's question. He says that there

43 K S R Sastri (1944: p. 65), 20 years before the CE was produced, and relying on verses that we now know to be spurious and to have been rejected by the CE, said that Daśaratha had great infatuation for Kaikeyī and that he neglected his eldest queen Kausalyā. Pollock (1986: p. 49), claiming to interpret the CE, makes similar incorrect statements, without adducing any real evidence. Sally J (Goldman) Sutherland (2003: pp. 150, 154) also makes unacceptable claims that Kausalyā was superseded by Kaikeyī and that Daśaratha was infatuated with the latter.

44 It should be noted that the Southern recension, said to be closest to the Critical Edition, reads *'upajīvinām'* instead of *'upajīvanam '*. See [2.31.20].

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is no need to worry about Kausalyā and Sumitrā, since Bharata will scrupulously honour both of them (2.28.6), and besides, the thousand villages that Kausalyā had received from Daśaratha or from her father (as nuptial gift? or wedding gift? or as some critics say, "subsistence allowance") could indeed support a thousand men like him (2.28.7), and therefore he, Lakṣmaṇa, is not needed to support her. Lakṣmaṇa's words do not imply in the least that Kausalyā was superseded when Kaikeyī arrived. Indeed, there is nothing anywhere in the Rāmāyaṇa that says that Kausalyā was ever superseded.[45]

§7.2 It is interesting to see how the skilful poet has linked Rāma's words in 2.28.2–4 and Lakṣmaṇa's reply in 2.28.6–7. He refers to both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as "clever in speech" (2.28.5: *vākyakovida; vākyajña*) — terms that he has not used for them on any other occasion. By the use of those terms, the poet wants us to see that Rāma was putting things in a clever way, testing (and teasing?) Lakṣmaṇa or setting a trap for him to make him remain in Ayodhyā. The poet wants us to see that Lakṣmaṇa realized this and therefore replied 'sweetly' (2.28.5: ślakṣṇayā girā), couching his reply in clever words. (Perhaps Lakṣmaṇa deliberately used the word *upajīvanam* instead of *'upajīvinām'*.) The poet thus presents the picture of two clever speakers engaged in gentle sparring with each other.[46] We may be certain that at the time of her wedding Kausalyā's father presented her with enormous riches as well as a large number of male and female servants as *kanyādānam*; we recall that Janaka at the time of his daughters' wedding gave them such lavish presents as *kanyādānam* (1.73.5–6: *dadau kanyāpitā tāsāṃ*

45 Pollock (1986: p. 49) asserts that Kausalyā was superseded; and in his note on 2.28.7 buried in p. 379 Pollock admits that there is no real evidence for it. The average reader who will read the "Introduction" but not scrutinize the notes with care will be misled by Pollock's remark in the "Introduction".

46 This technique of the poet can be seen also in his description of the Rāvaṇa–Mārīca conversation: Rāvaṇa who was hiding his true reason for wanting to abduct Sītā is called a *vākyakovida* (3.33.38), and Mārīca, who was not fooled, is described as very clever (*mahāprājña*) and a master of the art of speech (*vākyaviśārada*) (3.35.1) — almost the identical epithets the poet applies to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa! — And advises Rāvaṇa to be content with his own wives. Pollock's translation of the words *vākyakovida* and *vākyajña* in 2.28.5 as 'eloquent' is far from adequate.

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dāsīdāsam anuttamam | hiraṇyasya suvarṇasya muktānāṃ vidrumasya ca || dadau paramasaṃhṛṣṭaḥ kanyādānam anuttamam |). The Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa conversation fulfils the poet's purpose of emphasizing (to us, his audience) Lakṣmaṇa's devotion to Rāma.

(The CE, which is based on 'text-criticism' — that is, on the number of a group of manuscripts that contain any given passage — uses the word *upajīvanam* (in 2.28.7), which would translate as 'subsistence'; but the Southern recension as well as the oldest dated Rāmāyaṇa manuscript that is available and several of the oldest commentaries on the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa read the text as *upajīvinām* instead,[47] thus indicating that the thousand villages given to Kausalyā were for the welfare of her followers/attendants. Thus, perhaps, if we applied what is called 'higher criticism', it is the wording *upajīvinām* that should be accepted. But that would be missing the beauty of the poet's technique as given in the CE text.)

Another passage that is easily misunderstood is verse 2.17.22 where Kausalyā says that she was hoping to find in her son Rāma the happiness that Daśaratha was not able to give her. Does it mean that her husband did not love her?[48] When Kaikeyī arrived, was Kausalyā 'superseded'?[49]

47 These commentaries are among the oldest and include the *Tattvadīpikā* of Maheśvaratīrtha, the *Amṛtakaṭaka* of Mādhava Yogīndra and the *Rāmāyaṇatilaka* of Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa ("Rāma"). See the CE vol. 2, p. ix. See the Southern recension [2.31.20] for the reading '*upajīvinām* '.

48 As K S R Sastri (1944: Part 1, p. 65) and Pollock (1986: p. 49) say. Pollock (1986: p. 61) claims that Daśaratha recognized "the weakness and imprudence that led him to spurn Kausalyā and come under Kaikeyī's power (57.6–7)". It is a ridiculous claim. *Sarga 57* is devoted entirely to the broodings of Daśaratha about his unintentional killing of the hermit youth, and so on. The *sarga* has nothing at all to indicate that Daśaratha spurned Kausalyā, etc. Indeed, although Pollock makes his claim boldly in the *Introduction* to *RV*, vol. 2, he admits in a note on 2.57.7 buried in p. 432 that his interpretation of the verse may not be correct. It is shown in this chapter that Pollock is mistaken in almost all of his remarks about Daśaratha.

49 As Pollock (1986: p. 49) and some other critics say. Pollock misinterprets 2.17.22 [20.38] and cites his note on 2.10.40. But that note is concerned with passages omitted by the Critical Edition and relegated to the appendix, and therefore are passages irrelevant to a discussion of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* which, as Pollock himself says (p. 25), is given by the text of the Critical Edition. But above all, it is most unfair of Pollock to make a fuss about 2.17.22, taking it literally and totally ignoring 2.56.11–13.

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To answer these questions one must properly understand verse 2.17.22. The verse contain the words uttered by Kausalyā who, in the poet's words, was "tortured by unhappiness", unhappiness that was too much for her to bear (2.17.19: *asukhārtā*; 2.17.33: *bhṛśam asukham amarṣitā*). But, as Kausalyā herself said later (see §5.4.2 above), words uttered by someone whose mind is tortured by unhappiness should not be confused for sober judgment.

§8.1 Similarly in regard to the verse 2.10.17, where Daśaratha says to Kaikeyī that except for Rāma, there is not a single person he loved as much as he loved her, we cannot interpret these words of a loving husband to his sulking wife as indicating that he did not love his other wives.

§8.2 As a matter of fact, there is evidence in the Rāmāyaṇa that Daśaratha probably cared *much more* for Kausalyā (and for Sumitrā) than he did for Kaikeyī. Recall that when, at the end of the sacrifice performed so that Daśaratha may be blessed with a son, and the divine being that arose out of the fire gave Daśaratha a golden vessel with porridge eating which his wives would produce sons, Daśaratha went *first* to Kausalyā, and gave her *half* of the porridge; he then gave a *one-fourth* portion of it to Sumitrā, only *one-eighth* portion to Kaikeyī and the remaining one-eighth portion to Sumitrā again (1.15.25–27). That Daśaratha gave the porridge first to Kausalyā and that too, four times as much as he gave to Kaikeyī can be interpreted as indicating that he cared much more for Kausalyā than for Kaikeyī.[50]

§9 A critic might as well claim that in verse 2.28.3 Rāma himself refers to Daśaratha as "caught in the snare of desire" [or, in the snare of affection] (2.28.3: *kāmapāśaparyastaḥ*).[51] But that verse also can be understood properly only by recognizing that the verses 2.28.1–6 illustrates Rāma's

50 It is unfortunate that some scholars have been misled by certain spurious verses (e.g. [2.20.42]: "*atyantaṃ nigṛhītāsmi bhartur nityam atantritā* |...," found in the Southern and possibly some other recensions of the Rāmāyaṇa but not in the CE, and conclude that Kausalyā was mourning the loss of Daśaratha's esteem.

51 Note that *'kāma'* means *'affection'* as well as *'desire'*.

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testing of Lakṣmaṇa. For, Daśaratha was caught not in the snare of desire, but in the snare of truthfulness. One must observe that Vālmīki soon after refers to the king as "truthful and righteous . . . *as free from taint as the sky*" (2.31.6: *sa satyavādī dharmātmā . . . ākāśa iva niṣpaṅkaḥ*); and Rāma too refers to Daśaratha as "righteous" (2.33.17), a view that he continued to hold ever after (see e.g., 2.97.19, 22). We recall also what Nārada had told the poet that *because Daśaratha was righteous and true to his word*, he was forced to exile his beloved son (1.1.21: *sa satyavacanād rājā dharmapāśena saṃyataḥ | vivāsayāmāsa sutaṃ rāmaṃ daśarathapriyam* ||), and Vālmīki himself accordingly describes Daśaratha as one who was righteous and who had conquered his senses (1.6.2: *dharmarataḥ* ; 1.6.3: *vijitendriyaḥ, vaśī*, 2.10.1: *vaśī*), was faithful to his promises (1.6.5: *satyābhisaṃdha*), and was free from all blemish (1.7.15: *anaghaḥ*). (See also §13 below)

§10 A critic determined to find fault with Daśaratha cites Bharata's words in (2.98.50–55, 66), and claims that "the argument is finally and forcefully made that what Daśaratha did was mad, 'done in delusion'; it was 'sinful, contrary to all that is right and good', 'he did it just to please a woman,' and thus Rāma is urged to save his father 'from sin'.[52] But the words in the passages cited are the words of Bharata, which were *rejected* by Rāma as unfair; Rāma pointed out that what Daśaratha did was because his *truthfulness* constrained him to honour the boon he had given to his wife Kaikeyī (2.99.6–8). It should be noted also that Bharata was not fully informed of the circumstances of Rāma's banishment, and further, that he seems to have had, for some unknown reason, some long-standing resentment, or even hatred, against his mother; for, when the messengers from Ayodhyā came to him in Rājagṛha and urged him to return to Ayodhyā to attend to some "urgent business" (2.64.3: *tvaramāṇaś ca niryāhi kṛtyam ātyayikaṃ tvayā*),[53] he spoke to them, highly praising Kausalyā (as 'noble', 'righteous') and Sumitrā too (as

52 The commentator Pollock (1986: p. 30) makes such claim. He makes it sound worse by translating the word *strī* as 'woman' instead of 'wife'.

53 The statement by R P Goldman and Sally J Goldman (2004: p. 80) that Bharata returned home alerted to the catastrophe at Ayodhyā by prophetic dreams is not consistent with the Critical Edition of the Rāmāyaṇa.

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'righteous') (2.64.7–8), but spoke very insultingly of his own mother Kaikeyī as 'selfish, hot-tempered and irascible' (2.64.9: ātmakāmā sadā caṇḍī krodhanā prājñamāninī | . . . *kaikeyī mātā me* ||). That he should speak of his mother in this manner to the messengers — servants of the king — shows that Bharata was, to say the least, quite immature. After all, in the Rāmāyaṇa, except in the few *sargas* (like *sargas* 10–12 of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*) when she had been deluded by Mantharā, Kaikeyī is described as most affectionate towards Rāma; for instance, when Mantharā told her that Rāma was to be consecrated Prince-Regent (2.7.7) the next day, and followed it with attempts to poison her mind (2.7.10–26), Kaikeyī presented her with jewellery (2.7.28), saying, "I draw no distinction between Rāma and Bharata . . . You could not possibly have told me better news than this [the impending consecration of Rāma]" (2.7.29–30).

§11 What the author of the epic says is most important — much more important than what any character in the Rāmāyaṇa, or a commentator, ancient or modern, says. Vālmīki describes Daśaratha in the highest terms as one who was pure-hearted, had conquered his senses, and was truthful.

§12.1 The commentator Pollock (1986, p. 16) claims that Rāma was (i) dispossessed and (ii) driven from his country through a (iii) tyrant's (iv) unrighteous conduct ((v) resulting from sexual excess). It is shown below that, each of the above claims is baseless.

§12.2 *Regarding the claims (i)–(iii) above:* Rāma had not been consecrated as Prince-Regent when he left on exile. So, it is not quite correct to say that he was dispossessed and that too, by Daśaratha. In fact, Daśaratha himself did not directly ask Rāma to go into exile.[54] Indeed, he asked Rāma to depose him and take over the throne.[55] Rāma went into exile, not because it was the king's command or wish, but because he knew that his *father* had promised Kaikeyī to grant her anything she

54 Pollock himself acknowledges this. See Pollock (1986: p. 30 and also p. 62, note 9).

55 Daśaratha said to Rāma: "Depose me now, and become king of Ayodhyā yourself" (2.31.23).

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wished for, and it was her wish that Rāma go into exile. For Rāma, it was imperative that his father's words should not become false. Pollock makes the totally baseless claim that King Daśaratha was a *tyrant*, that is, an absolute ruler unrestrained by law who, using absolute power oppressively dispossessed Rāma and drove him from his country. The Rāmāyaṇa itself has said that the king was free from blemish (1.7.15: *anaghaḥ*), and that he pleased his subjects by his righteousness" (1.7.16: *prajā dharmeṇa rañjayan*). The people of Ayodhyā too, when they became aware of why Rāma was going on exile, blamed Kaikeyī and not Daśaratha (2.42.18–21). This is not at all the picture that Pollock paint of the king.

§12.3 Regarding the claim *(iv) above that Daśaratha's conduct was unrighteous:* The Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly refers to Daśaratha as righteous, blameless and free of blemish, as we shall discuss soon below (see §13).[56] Contrary to Pollock's accusation of 'unrighteousness', it was precisely because Daśaratha was righteous and felt constrained by his rigid devotion to his given word, to truthfulness, that he could not reject Kaikeyī's demand that Rāma should go into exile; he had promised to grant her whatever she wished for; he had not in the least suspected that she would come up with a preposterous wish. He pleaded with her, he cajoled her, he scolded her, he begged her to withdraw her demand, but she would not, and then he disowned her.

§12.4 Regarding the claim *(v):* Coming to the final accusation that Daśaratha's conduct arose from 'sexual excess', we saw above that the king's conduct arose from his devotion to truthfulness. In order to assuage the sorrow of a loved one, we all have at one time or other promised that we will give whatever the person wants, because we do not in the least expect that we will be asked for something preposterous.

56 Pollock (1986: p. 28) wants us to dismiss all that by postulating that the 'monumental version', the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, was a revision by Vālmīki in order to "preserve the honesty and integrity of Daśaratha". His position is unacceptable, for, (1) of what is the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* a "revision"? And (2) even assuming that there was something of which the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* is a revision, it is not relevant to a study of the characters of personages in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Note that Goldman (2003a: p.22) says: "Although earlier and parallel versions of the tale have been hypothesized, we have no evidence of their having actually existed."

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§13 Let us compare what the commentator Pollock has said about Daśaratha with what characters in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Rāmāyaṇa itself say. The Rāmāyaṇa refers to Daśaratha as highly virtuous and a royal seer like the great rishis, guileless and totally free from blemish (see note 19). Daśaratha as strict upholder of truth is indicated by the Rāmāyaṇa itself; it says that Kausalyā used the words *satyapratijña* and *dharmātmā* to describe the king (2.17.12), just before Rāma gives her the news that Daśaratha is exiling him (2.17.14–16). Daśaratha himself says, "I am bound by the bonds of righteousness" (2.12.16: *dharmabandhena baddho 'smi*) and that he was "confused by the boon he granted to Kaikeyī" earlier that very day (2.31.23: *kaikeyyā varadānena mohitaḥ*). Rāma repeatedly hammers his conviction, "This command of father's is based on righteousness *(dharma)*" (2.18.33),[57] and says, "Daśaratha is a truthful man, true to his word" (2.19.7: *satyaḥ satyābhisaṃdaś ca nityaṃ satyaparākramaḥ*), "my father keeps to the path of righteousness and truth" (2.27.30: *satyadharmapathe sthitaḥ*). When Bharata in his anguish criticised Daśaratha, Rāma repeatedly referred to Daśaratha as righteous (2.97.19, 22) and "a great soul [*mahātmā*] equal to Indra himself" (2.97.24). Even the people of Ayodhyā viewed Rāma's exile as a matter of honouring a promise that has been made; they said "[Rāma] does not want his father's promise to become false" (2.30.7). Vasiṣṭa said that Daśaratha acted in accordance with *dharma* (2.76.4: *dharmam ācaran*).

§14 It was shown above that there is no justification for the criticism made by Pollock and other modern critics that Daśaratha had acted out of "lust", or "in a mad passion", or "out of sexual excess" etc. He was a gentle, loving, truthful and righteous person. We see that when all the misgivings, misunderstandings and misrepresentations of various critics have been dealt with, the story of Daśaratha is exactly as summarized in *sarga* 1 of the Bālakāṇḍa: Kaikeyī who had been granted a boon, asked

57 2.18.33: Rāma says: *dharmo hi paramo loke dharme satyaṃ pratiṣṭhitam | dharmasaṃśritam etac ca piturvacanam uttamam ||*

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as her boon the exile of Rāma, and the king, bound by truthfulness and dharma, could not refuse to exile his dear son (1.1.20–21).[58]

Kausalyā, Kaikeyī and Sumitrā

§15 A few years after King Daśaratha had married Kausalyā and the marriage had not produced any offspring, the king must have married Sumitrā, with the expectation that she would bless him with a son. A few years after that, when Sumitrā was also childless Daśaratha, who was aware that a male offspring was necessary for the smooth continuance of the dynasty, married yet again. Kaikeyī thus came into the royal household in Ayodhyā.[59]

(The Rāmāyaṇa does not say explicitly that Daśaratha's marriages were in the order stated above. But it does say explicitly that Kausalyā was his eldest wife (verse 2.3.23 refers to her as his *jyeṣṭhā dharmapatnī*); also, in verse 2.19.22 Rāma, while talking to Lakṣmaṇa refers to Kaikeyī as their "younger mother" (*mātā yavīyasī); further, verses 1.15.25–26* say that when Daśaratha received the *pāyasam* at the *putrakāmeṣṭi* sacrifice, he gave half the amount to Kausalyā, three–eighths to Sumitrā and only one–eighth to Kaikeyī, which may suggest that Daśaratha had married Kausalyā, Sumitrā and Kaikeyī in that order.)

To the great disappointment and concern of Daśaratha, the marriage with Kaikeyī also did not yield him a son. At last, Daśaratha consulted his advisors and conducted a special sacrifice, as a result of which all three of his queens became pregnant and he obtained Rāma, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna as sons.

§16 Vālmīki does not give an extensive treatment of the qualities of Daśaratha's queens, nor of their mutual relationships, nor of the depth of

58 1.1.20: . . . *kaikeyī | pūrvaṃ dattavarā devī varam enam ayācata | vivāsanaṃ ca rāmasya bharatasyābhiṣecanam* || 1.1.21: *sa satyavacanād rājā dharmapāśena saṃyataḥ | vivāsayāmāsa sutaṃ rāmaṃ daśarathaḥ priyam* ||

59 Vālmīki does not say explicitly why Daśaratha married Sumitrā and Kaikeyī, or that he married Sumitrā before he married Kaikeyī. But there are indications in the Rāmāyaṇa in support of what is stated in the paragraph. (See e.g. 1.13.26, 28; 1.15.25)

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Daśaratha's affection for them; but there are enough details scattered in the poem to refute several wrong assertions by various commentators.

§17.1 The commentator Pollock (1986, pp. 49, 61) claims, largely on the basis of verse 2.17.22, that Kausalyā was never loved by Daśaratha, and was spurned by the king ever since the arrival of Kaikeyī. It was shown earlier that Kausalyā's words in verse 2.17.22 which were uttered when her mind was greatly tormented should be disregarded by the principle (the Kausalyā–Principle) enunciated by Kausalyā herself. Pollock claims that Kausalyā was superseded when Kaikeyī arrived. It has been shown above that, the claim is incorrect.

The wrong impression that Daśaratha never liked Kausalyā but spurned her and that "with the arrival of Kaikeyī, she was superseded" could easily lead one to even more wrong statements. One will tend to imagine jealousy and bitter animosity in Kausalyā towards Kaikeyī, even when none such really existed. For instance, the commentator Pollock considers verse 2.4.39 where Kausalyā says that when Rāma is made the Yuvarājā it will bring joy to her kinsmen and also to Sumitrā's, as evidence of what he calls "the profound enmity" between Kausalyā and Kaikeyī. He says (1986, note on 2.4.39) that since Kausalyā did not mention Kaikeyī's name, it is a pointer to her animosity towards Kaikeyī; in support he cites verse 2.8.26 where Mantharā tells Kaikeyī, "You used to spurn Kausalyā, how could she fail to repay that enmity [when Rāma comes into power]?" It is not surprising that Pollock (1986) then considers 2.4.38–39 as an indication that ever since the arrival of Kaikeyī, "[Kausalyā] sought retribution for her wrongs by her son's accession to the throne" (p. 49).

In his above conclusions, the commentator Pollock overlooks that when Kausalyā uttered the words in 2.4.39 to Rāma, Sumitrā was also present. That explains why she mentioned Sumitrā's name, following a speech mannerism that occurs in more than one place in the Rāmāyaṇa: the speaker attaches the greatest, and often the only, importance or even recognition, to members of the immediate audience. Further, in citing Mantharā's words in support of his thesis, Pollock overlooks the fact

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that she is a witness with no credibility, a fact already noted in §3.1 of the Introduction.

§17.2 The commentator Pollock's claim in fact paints Kausalyā as a most vicious and wicked woman. He says that she had harboured "profound enmity" towards Kaikeyī ever since the latter's arrival, and had "then on sought retribution for her wrongs by her son's accession to the throne" (Pollock 1986, p. 49; see also pp. 335–336). Bharata however, said that Kausalyā treated his mother like a sister (2.67.7: *tvayi . . . bhaginyām iva vartate*). If however Kausalyā had merely pretended, over *many* years, to be affectionate and friendly towards Kaikeyī while in fact harbouring profound enmity towards her, she would indeed be a horribly detestable woman. But let us see what the Rāmāyaṇa really says about her.

The Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly praises Kausalyā's qualities. It calls her 'a most excellent woman who is full of the purest nobility' (2.3.30: *pramadottamā*; 2.34.28: śuddhasattvā); it praises her as glorious (2.22.12, 2.77.6: *yaśasvinī*). Even Kaikeyī's attendants refer to Kausalyā as glorious, compassionate, generous and righteous (2.72.14: *sānukrośāṃ vadānyāṃ ca dharmajñāṃ ca yaśasvinīṃ kausalyāṃ . . .*). In all probability, they were influenced by Kaikeyī's own feelings towards Kausalyā. Bharata praises her profusely as wise, sagacious, unselfish and righteous (2.67.7: *dīrghadarśinī*; 2.64.7: āryā ca dharmaniratā dharmajñā dharmadarśinī). Even Lord Śiva refers to her as 'glorious' (6.107.4: *yaśasvinī*). Kausalyā's great nobility can be seen also in the frequent description of Rāma as "Kausalyā's son", or as "who gives joy to Kausalyā."[60] (See the Introduction, on the use of "tags")

Kaikeyī is a tragic figure who, in spite of her best instincts, triggered the exile of Rāma and thus the entire Rāmāyaṇa story. For centuries, she has been reviled — by the commentators, and influenced by them, by the general public too — as an evil, wicked woman. People have proudly bestowed their children the names of Kausalyā and Sumitrā (as well as of Daśaratha, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Śatrughna), but not of Kaikeyī.

60 For instance: *kausalyāsuta* (2.104.20); *kausalyānandavardhana* (1.1.16, 1.67.15, 1.72.17, 2.66.33, 2.84.11, 6.31.67, 6.115.40, etc.; *kausalyāsuprajā* (1.22.2).

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Ever since she was born, Kaikeyī had been living under Mantharā's care and had developed a natural affection and respect for her. Indeed, Mantharā was more like a zealous and over-protective mother wielding considerable authority over her ward Kaikeyī, than an obedient servant to Kaikeyī. She had no qualms about speaking angrily to Kaikeyī (2.7.12); she repeatedly called her a foolish child (2.7.10: *mūḍhe!* 2.8.2 *bāliśe!*) and did not heSītāte to describe her mistress' husband, King Daśaratha as deceitful, cruel, "an enemy pretending to be your husband", "a viper whom you have taken to your bosom" and so on (2.7.20–23, 25). Kaikeyī listened to all that without getting angry at Mantharā, for ever since she was a baby, she had grown up with affection and respect for Mantharā. Far from getting angry, Kaikeyī presented Mantharā with jewellery for the good news she had brought about Rāma's consecration as the Yuvarājā (2.7.27–31). Even after Kaikeyī's demands on Daśaratha that Rāma be exiled and Bharata be consecrated as the Yuvarājā, Rāma, who was an excellent judge of people (2.1.20: *puruṣāntarakovidaḥ*) said that she was a very good-natured and virtuous person and he correctly observed to Lakṣmaṇa that she had never differentiated between her son Bharata and him (2.19.15). (We note that Kaikeyī also said the same thing to Mantharā (2.7.30: *rāme vā bharate vā aham viśeṣam nopalakṣaye | tasmāt tuṣṭā'smi yad rājā rāmam rājye abhiṣekṣyati ||).*) Later too Rāma calls Kaikeyī righteous (2.97.19: *dharmaśīlā*) and glorious (2.99.5: *yaśasvinī*). In his words, in 2.21.8 and in 2.*sarga* 47, taken literally he seems to be harshly critical of her; but his words do not reflect his true feelings, but are merely part of a ruse he adopted to make Kausalyā withdraw her request to be taken along with him into exile, and to make Lakṣmaṇa return to Ayodhyā, respectively (see 2.21.8–9; 2.47.16: *ayodhyām ita eva tvam kālye praviśa lakṣmaṇa*). We note that later too Rāma refers to Kaikeyī as "glorious" (6.109.19: *yaśasvinī*); and so does the text of the *VR* (6.115.39: *yaśasvinī*).

The Rāmāyaṇa gives several hints along the way. The great seer Bharadvāja asks Bharata not to impute any fault to Kaikeyī because of the banishment of Rāma (2.86.28); also, more subtly, the poet has often referred to Kaikeyī as 'beautiful' and 'foremost of women' (1.76.8:

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sumadhyamā; 2.7.28: *pramadottamā;* 2.9.43: *varāṅganā;* 2.9.44: *hemopamā;* 2.99.5: *varavarṇinī*). In view of the concomitance of beauty and virtue in Sanskrit literature (already noted in the Introduction), these words indicate that Kaikeyī was virtuous. Of course, there were occasions when Vālmīki appears to revile Kaikeyī (see for instance 2.12.1, 8, 12; 2.16.45), but those words of Vālmīki are only 'anticipatory reflections', or echoes, of the minds of the ordinary reader/listener of the story.

The question may be asked as to why, if she was such a good person, did Kaikeyī make, and stick to, her atrocious demands to Daśaratha. The answer is that she had come under the influence of Mantharā who cleverly manipulated her. She was a puppet in Mantharā's hands, and carried out her instructions faithfully: going into her private chamber, Kaikeyī lay on the floor and sulked till Daśaratha offered to give her whatever she wanted. Then, saying that he had once offered to give her two boons, she made him swear that he would grant them (2.9.21). As instructed by Mantharā, Kaikeyī then asked as her boons that Rāma be exiled and Bharata be made the Yuvarājā (2.9.23, 2.10.28–29).

Kaikeyī loved Rāma as much as she did Bharata and as she told Mantharā, made no distinction between them; she said in (2.7.30: *rāme vā bharate vā 'haṃ viśeṣaṃ n'opalakṣaye*). She was so happy to hear that Daśaratha was going to make Rāma the Yuvarājā. She gave a lovely piece of jewellery as reward to Mantharā who had brought her the news (2.7.27). But Mantharā succeeded in poisoning Kaikeyī's mind, planting fear in it. Where fear takes root, sane thinking tends to disappear. That is what happened to Kaikeyī — till she realized some time later that she had been led to make a terrible mistake.

At first Kausalyā and Sumitrā did not know that Mantharā had manipulated Kaikeyī into tricking Daśaratha into promising to grant her two boons and then to ask as boons the exiling of Rāma and the consecration of Bharata as the Yuvarājā. Tormented by grief, Kausalyā more than once burst into angry words at Daśaratha (2.38.1–20; 2.51.25–27; 2.55.1–21). But before long, Kausalyā (and Sumitrā) would

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have realized that it was fate in the form of Mantharā that had actually tricked Kaikeyī, and would have gotten over whatever anger they had felt against Kaikeyī. Kaikeyī, for her part, would have realized that she had acted most reprehensibly in demanding Rāma's exile. Quite likely, Sumitrā in her sagacious manner would have restored good relations between Kausalyā and Kaikeyī, with Kaikeyī expressing her sorrowful regret for her actions and Kausalyā forgiving her for having been misled by Mantharā. Her attitude towards Kaikeyī is reflected in Bharadvāja's admonition to Bharata: "You should not blame Kaikeyī" (2.86.28: *na doṣeṇa avagantavyā kaikeyī*). The affection and sisterly relationship that existed earlier between Kausalyā and Kaikeyī can be seen in the latter's joy upon hearing that the former's son Rāma was going to be made the Yuvarājā (2.7.29, 31), as well as in Bharata's remark to his mother that Kausalyā always treated her as her sister (2.67.7: *tvayi . . . bhaginyām iva vartate*) and especially in the fact that when Bharata set out to bring back Rāma from Citrakūṭa, the three queens, travelling together, also went with him. As the poet says, "Kaikeyī, Sumitrā and glorious Kausalyā *travelled together in the same carriage,* happy at the thought that they will bring Rāma back to Ayodhyā" (2.77.6: *kaikeyī ca sumitrā ca kausalyā ca yaśasvinī | rāmānayanasaṃhṛṣṭā yayur yānena bhāsvatā* ||). The poet indicates Kaikeyī's great eagerness to bring Rāma back by mentioning her name first; and by referring to Kausalyā as "glorious Kausalyā", he seems to indicate that Kausalyā had quite forgiven Kaikeyī.

Just before the queens met Rāma in Citrakūṭa, they saw the place where Rāma had offered a simple "meal" for his dead father and Kausalyā broke into lamentation (2.96.11–12); Kaikeyī as well as Sumitrā tried to comfort her (2.96.13). When Rāma's mothers (including Kaikeyī) saw Rāma, they all broke into weeping. All this shows that Kaikeyī's action demanding Rāma's exile had been forgiven by her co–wives who knew that her demands were made only at the instigation of Mantharā (2.60.6); also that Kaikeyī felt great remorse for her action and earnestly wished to bring Rāma back to Ayodhyā. And they all joined with Bharata and others in imploring Rāma to return to Ayodhyā (2.98.71).

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Kaikeyī's good nature is clearly seen in her act of presenting Mantharā with an ornament for bringing to her the news – news that gave her great joy – which Rāma, who was as dear to her as her own son Bharata, was going to be consecrated the next day as the Yuvarāja. Kaikeyī completely disregarded Mantharā's bitter words that Rāma's consecration would be disastrous for her. Vālmīki pays tribute to Kaikeyī's good nature by referring to her as the best of women (2.7.28: *pramadottamā.*). (We reject Pollock's translation of the word as "most beautiful of women".)[61]

The good natured Kaikeyī, whom the poet had praised as 'foremost of women' (*pramadottamā*) was temporarily transformed by Mantharā's manipulation into an ignoble person; but she recovered her true, noble nature soon after. Perhaps the poet indicates this by referring to Bharata more than once by the rare tag "the son of Kaikeyī" (2.97.4: *kekayīputra*; 2.97.14: *kekayīsuta*; 6.116.1: *kaikeyyānandavardhanaḥ*) and by referring to Kaikeyī herself later as "glorious" (6.115.39: *yaśasvinī*).

Sumitrā, as befitting her name, was a good friend of both Kausalyā and Kaikeyī. Just as the Rāmāyaṇa describes Rāma as rooted in righteousness (3.9.1: *dharme sthitaḥ*), it describes Sumitrā also as rooted in righteousness (2.39.1: *dharme sthitā*). Sītā and Bharata too praise her as 'glorious' and 'righteous' (2.49.13: *yaśasvinī*; 2.64.8: *dharmajñā*). She was calm, gentle, sagacious and a *dīrghadarśini* — that is, one who is far–sighted, viewing things in a 'long–range', philosophical perspective. Kausalyā felt shattered by Rāma's proposal to go on exile for 14 years; she was plunged in grief and lamented a lot before she could give her leave for Rāma to go on the exile. But Sumitrā, though saddened that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa both wanted to go on the exile, retained her calm, and her parting advice to Lakṣmaṇa has become a classic gem. She said to him, "Look upon Rāma as your father Daśaratha,

61 When Kaikeyī is referred to as *pramadottamā* , the commentator Pollock (*RV* 2), for his own reasons translates it (incorrectly) as "the most beautiful of women"; when the word refers to Kausalyā, he translates it correctly as "the excellent lady" (2.3.30) and "the best of women" (2.3.91), although this would contradict what he has said of her; for according to him, Kausalyā had felt "superseded" by Kaikeyī and "sought retribution" – for twenty years or so! – All the while pretending to be affectionate like a sister to Kaikeyī. (See Pollock: *RV* 2,p. 49)

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and look upon Sītā as me [your mother], and look upon the forest as Ayodhyā. Go in happiness, my dear son!" (2.35.8: *rāmaṃ daśarathaṃ viddhi, māṃ viddhi janakātmajām | ayodhyām aṭavīṃ viddhi gaccha tāta yathāsukham* ||). A whole *sarga* (2.*sarga* 38) of the Rāmāyaṇa is devoted to Kausalyā's anguished lamentation when Rāma left for the forest, and all of the next *sarga* is devoted to Sumitrā's calm and wise words that completely dissipated Kausalyā's sorrowful concerns (2.39.16).

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2
Sugrīva and Aṅgada

Sugrīva is an important figure in the Rāmāyaṇa. He is mentioned in all the kāṇḍas of the epic except Ayodhyākāṇḍa. When Daśaratha had distributed to his three queens the divine pāyasam that he had obtained at the putra-kāmeṣṭi sacrifice, Brahma asked the Devas to create in the form of vānaras (monkeys) strong and valorous supporters (for Rāma) capable of assuming any form of their choice (1.16.2, 9, 17). The vānaras could fight with their teeth and nails as well as with other weapons (1.16.13: *sarvāstrakovidāḥ*). Especially talented and valorous were the vānaras Vālī and his younger brother Sugrīva. Many other vānaras, like Hanumān, Naḷa, Nīla and others were also highly talented.

§2 During Rāma's exile in the forest, Sītā was abducted by Rāvaṇa; Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa went searching for her and met the rākṣasa Kabandha. He seized them both with an intent to eat them. But they cut off his arms, and Kabandha revealed that he was really the celestial being Danu, a dānava, who had been cursed to have a hideous rākṣasa form due to some bad pranks he had played. He also said that he had been told that when Rāma overcomes him and cremates him, he would resume his form as a celestial being. Rāma told him about himself and agreed to cremate him after he first tells them where they can find Rāvaṇa who had abducted Sītā.

Kabandha said to Rāma, "When you have cremated me, I shall then tell you of one who is virtuous, and he can tell you about the rākṣasa who has abducted Sītā; make friends with him; he will help you. There is

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nothing in all the three worlds that he does not know, for he had to roam about them for a certain reason" (3.67.29–31).

dagdhas tvayā aham avaṭe nyāyena raghunandana | vakṣyāmi tam aham vīra yas tam jñāsyati rākṣasam || 29 || tena sakhyam ca kartavyam nyāyavṛttena rāghava | kalpayiṣyati te prītas sāhāyyam laghuvikramaḥ || 30 ||

Danu, when he was cremated by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, regained his heavenly form, and told Rāma about Sugrīva: "The monkey Sugrīva was banished from his country by his brother Vālī in a fit of anger and lives on the mountain Rśyamūka, in dread of Vālī"(3.68.11–12, 16). Danu strongly and repeatedly advised and urged Rāma to meet Sugrīva; he told Rāma to lay aside his weapons and to forge a friendship–pact with Sugrīva (3.68.13, 17; 3, 69, 36) with fire as witness to assure that, neither party will ever turn treacherous and become inimical towards the other (3.68.13: *adrohāya*).

śrūyatām rāma vakṣyāmi sugrīvo nāma vānaraḥ | *bhrātrā nirastaḥ kruddhena Vālīā śakrasūnunā* || 3.68.11 || *vayasyam tam kuru kṣipram ito gatvā adya rāghava | adrohāya samāgamya dīpyamāne vibhāvasau || 3.68.13 || sannidhāya āyudham . . . kuru rāghava satyena vayasyam vanacāriṇam || 3.68.17 || sakhyam kuruṣva iti tadā abhyuvāca || 3.69.36 ||*

Danu told Rāma that Sugrīva, the "king of the monkeys", was the son of Ṛkṣarajas and the natural offspring of the Sun–god; that he is very powerful, capable of assuming any form and that he always honours claims of gratitude (3.68.14: *. . .. sugrīvo vānarādhipaḥ | kṛtajñaḥ kāmarūpī ca*); that he had been driven out of his country by his brother Vālī in a fit of rage and had to roam all over the world seeking safety ever since Vālī became inimical towards him and wronged him; that at last Sugrīva found refuge in a cave in the ṛśyamūka mountain by the Lake Pampā, that he has been wandering since then along the lake in dread of

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Vālī (3.68.11, 16). Danu told Rāma, "Become his friend at once, with fire as witness. He is capable of restoring Sītā to you, wherever she might be kept hidden (3.68.13, 22).[62]

sa meruśṛṅgāgragatām aninditām praviśya pātālatale' pi vā āŚrītām | plavaṅgamānām pravaras tava priyām nihatya rakṣamsi punaḥ pradāsyati || 3.68.22 ||

Danu said also that Sugrīva sometimes takes up his position on the peak of the Ṛśyamūka mountain which no wrongdoer or evil may ascend and survive (3.69.26, 32).

na tvenam viṣamācāraḥ pāpakarmā adhirohati | tatraiva praharanty enam suptam ādāya rākṣasāḥ || 26 || tasyām vasati sugrīvaḥ caturbhis saha vānaraiḥ | kadācit śikhare tasya parvatasya avatiṣṭhate || 32 ||

Danu, a heavenly being, thus provided even a proof of Sugrīva's virtuousness. Rāma, whom the Rāmāyaṇa describes as an excellent judge of people (*2.1.20: puruṣāntarakovidaḥ*), was convinced of Sugrīva's character from what he heard from Danu; indeed, soon after, Rāma himself referred to Sugrīva as *dharmātmā* and as *mahātmā* (3.71.7; 4.3.24; 4.18.19).

We saw that the celestial being Danu had also described Sugrīva as steadfast, mighty (3.68.12), of righteous conduct and of great prowess. Rāma also calls him a *dharmātmā* (3.71.7) and *mahātmā* (4.3.24; 4.18.19). Hanumān also refers to him as *mahātmā*, and *dharmātmā* (4.3.18, 19, 20; 4.4.2).

Let us see what Vālmīki, the author of the poem has said about Sugrīva. What he has said must carry the greatest weight. He says that Sugrīva was a *dharmātmā* (virtuous) (4.2.4), *tejasvī* (heroic/powerful) (4.5.18; 4.8.30; 6.85.17), *mahātmā* (high–souled/magnanimous/noble) (4.3.1; 4.4.2; 4.15.1; 4.35.12), *sattvasaṃpannaḥ* (highly virtuous) (4.28.27; 6.40.20), *mahātejāḥ* (most heroic/powerful/glorious) (6.57.75; 6.62.1), *bhīmabalaḥ, mahābalaḥ* (of awesome strength) (4.37.3; 6.40.1;

62 Indeed, Hanumān, Sugrīva's envoy, found Sītā and offered to carry her safely back to Rāma (5.35.28).

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6.63.31, 49), *mahāvīryaḥ* (of great prowess) (4.16.14), *raṇapaṇḍitaḥ* (of great skill in battle) (4.16.17), *indropamaḥ* (equal to Indra) (6.55.53), *mahāsattvaḥ* (of great virtue) (6.63.34), and so on. Thus we see that the Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly describes Sugrīva not only as heroic, and possessing great strength, courage and skill in battle and great prowess, but, what is important to note, also as highly virtuous and possessing the noblest qualities (4.28.27:*sattvasaṃpannaḥ*). Hanumān also refers to him as *mahātmā*, and *dharmātmā* (4.3.18–20).

Regarding Sugrīva's bravery

The Rāmāyaṇa contains *many* incidents of Sugrīva's bravery. He boldly challenged and fought against great warriors like Kumbhakarṇa (6.55.43ff) and the great Rāvaṇa himself (6.47.34ff) during the Laṅkā war. When Aṅgada was hard-pressed in his battle with Kumbha, Sugrīva put Aṅgada in the rear, thus shielding him, and himself battled against the mighty rākṣasa;[63] that is, just as Vālī had requested him (4.22.9: *mama prāṇaiḥ priyataram putram putram ivaurasam | . . . ahīnārtham sarvataḥ paripālaya* ||), he acted to protect Aṅgada, even at the risk of his own life. Undeterred by Kumbha's fierce arrows, he went and grabbed the rākṣasa's bow and broke it (6.63.35). Seeing that the rākṣasa was weaponless, he magnanimously told him to take rest, re-arm himself, and then came back to fight again (6.63.44); but Kumbha chose to fight hand-to-hand. In the fierce fight that ensued, Sugrīva killed the rākṣasa (6.63.53). He fought and killed other great warriors like Praghasa, Virūpākṣa and Mahodara too.[64] When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were rendered unconscious by the *nāgapāśa* (of Indrajit), and Rāma alone had recovered, Sugrīva told Suṣeṇa to take the two princes and the entire monkey army to Kiṣkindhā, and that he would by himself kill Rāvaṇa in battle and recover Sītā (6.40.25). The Rāmāyaṇa is careful to indicate that this was not an empty boast, for it introduces Sugrīva's speech by describing him as most virtuous (6.40.20: *sattvasampannaḥ*).

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63 6.63.29–30: *aṅgadaṃ pṛṣṭhataḥ kṛtvā bhrātṛjaṃ plavageśvaraḥ || abhidudrāva vegena sugrīvaḥ kumbham āhave |*

64 See 6.33.24; 6.47.34–35; 6.55.38–43; 6.63.51–53; 6.84.33; 6.85.27

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We have also the unassailable description of Sugrīva by the Rāmāyaṇa as "foremost of monkey warriors" (4.7.23: *harivīramukhyaḥ*), "of great prowess" (4.16.14: *mahāvīryaḥ*), "highly skilled in battle" (4.16.17: *raṇapaṇḍitaḥ*), "equal to Indra" (6.55.53: *indropamaḥ*), "valorous and noble" (6.63.34, 50: *vīryavān; 6.63.34: śrīmān, mahāsattvaḥ),* "of great prowess" (6.63.53: *bhīma-parākramaḥ*), "glorious" (6.85.17: *tejasvī*), and "highly skilled in the use of weapons" (6.85.24: śastraviśāradaḥ),[65] etc. Thus, it is clear that Sugrīva was an extremely brave and skilled warrior. Even Rāvaṇa refers to him as exceedingly valorous (5.44.9: *vipulavikrama*).[66]

Aṅgada

In the *VR*, harsh words about Sugrīva are uttered only by Vālī who was in a rage (4.10.20), and later, by Aṅgada when he was emaciated, starving and completely exhausted and was highly despondent (4.52.21–30).

Vālī later admitted that he had treated Sugrīva badly due to having been "carried away by some predestined confusion of mind" (4.22.3). It must be noted that Vālī gave his golden garland to Sugrīva (and not to Aṅgada who was also present there) (4.22.16, 19).

As for Aṅgada's outbursts against Sugrīva, it must be noted that Aṅgada was only a juvenile (4.22.12: *taruṇa*), a child although not childish (as Vālī described him in 4.22.8; *bālam enam abāliśam*); Lakṣmaṇa even addressed him as, "My dear child!" (4.30.32: *vatsa!*); Aṅgada lacked maturity. His mental breakdown and his loss of composure and judgement are again displayed in his mad outburst against Sugrīva in *sargas* 52 and 54 where he heaps abuse upon abuse on Sugrīva in a most unfair manner. In particular, he said that Sugrīva took steps

65 The commentator Lefeber (*RV* 4: p. 48 and especially note i65) takes the absurd position that Vālī, Sugrīva and other vānaras were capable of fighting only with teeth, claws, stones and trees. But the *VR* says that the vānaras were, like the Devas, "skilled in the use of all weapons" (see 1.16.4, 13). The verses 6.85.23ff describe Sugrīva using sword and shield in his fight against Mahodara.

66 Masson (1975: p.676) and Shulman (1975: p. 654) make the absurd claim that Sugrīva was a coward. Verse 1.16.19 of the *VR* says that the vānaras, born of the Devas (like Vālī and Sugrīva) "were all valorous heroes".

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to organize a search for Sītā not due to his righteousness but due to fear of, Lakṣmaṇa and that Sugrīva did so only after much delay and procrastination (4.54.6). It must be noted that he was not quite an adult and was at that time very exhausted and despondent. He was also under the misapprehension that he had failed to lead his team of monkeys to achieve their task within what he thought was the allotted period of one month (4.52.20–21) and that Sugrīva would therefore punish them severely (4.52.23–24). But in fact, Sugrīva had set no time limit for the teams sent to the northern and southern regions (and Aṅgada was leader of the team that was sent to the south).

In his rambling tirade against Sugrīva, Aṅgada said that steadfastness, integrity, uprightness, valour and firmness are not found in Sugrīva (4.54.2). His remarks were made when he and his troops were overcome by fear and despondency due to their failure to locate Sītā (4.52.15–18, 30); therefore, the remarks should not be taken as literally Vālīd, as the Kausalyā principle shows. Besides, we know from the *VR* itself that the accusations made by Aṅgada are totally false. In particular, Aṅgada's accusation of Sugrīva regarding organizing a search for Sītā only out of fear of Lakṣmaṇa has no basis at all; in fact, the Rāmāyaṇa says that Lakṣmaṇa begged Sugrīva to forgive him for saying that he (Sugrīva) had been procrastinating (4.35.20).

[It is a pity that the commentators R P Goldman (1984 p.10), Lefeber (1994 p. 42) and, R P Goldman and Sally Goldman (1996 p. 73) make the same accusations as Aṅgada did. See also the section on "Some examples of errors and carelessness of scholars" in the Introduction.]

Aṅgada's attitude to Sugrīva is seen also in his statement that Sugrīva will look upon him only as "the enemy's son" and so will not suffer him to live (4.54.8). But Sugrīva in fact looked upon Aṅgada with affection as his own son and was protective of him — just as Vālī had requested him (4.22.9).[67] This is made clear below.

67 4.22.9: [Vālī says to Sugrīva]: *mama prāṇaiḥ priyataraṃ putraṃ putram iva aurasam | . . . sarvataḥ paripālaya* ||

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Sugrīva had seen Rāvaṇa carrying off Sītā and flying towards the south. He would have guessed that Sītā was probably hidden somewhere in the southern regions. Of the search teams that were dispatched in the four directions to look for Sītā, the southbound team was the most important (see 4.46.14). Sugrīva put young Aṅgada, the inexperienced and immature adolescent, in charge of the team. However, he also took care to see that the young prince would have sagacious advisors in the team, including Hanumān, Suṣeṇa (Aṅgada's maternal grandfather) and Jāmbavān. During the Laṅkā war, when Aṅgada was hard-pressed in his battle with Kumbha, Sugrīva put Aṅgada in the rear, thus shielding him, and himself battled against mighty rākṣasa (6.63.29–30); that is, just as Vālī had requested him (4.22.9), he acted to protect Aṅgada, at the risk of his own life. Indeed, just as Vālī had requested him, Sugrīva did look upon Aṅgada as his own son. [68] We can infer this from the way Vālmīki describes the only Aṅgada–Sugrīva conversation recorded in the Rāmāyaṇa. In 6.40.2–4, we find that the poet refers to Aṅgada as "*the son of Vālī*" (*Vālīputra*) speaking rather irreverently to Sugrīva, "Can't you see Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa lying on the ground on a bed of arrows?" The poet then says that Sugrīva replied to "*his son Aṅgada*" (*putram aṅgadam*).[69] Aṅgada was *Vālīputra* for everybody except Sugrīva for whom he was his own *son* (6.40.4: *putra,* 6.57.75: *kumāra*). The poet thus deftly indicates that although Aṅgada still had not lost his animosity toward Sugrīva and had not begun to look upon him as his father, the latter looked upon him as his own son.

68 See the next note.

69 6.40.2 4: *sugrīvasya vacaḥ śrutvā Vālīputro 'ṅgado 'bravīt | na tvaṃ paśyasi rāmaṃ ca lakṣmaṇaṃ ca mahābalam* || śarajālācitau vīrāvubhau daśarathātmajau | śaratalpe mahātmānau śayānau rudhirokṣitau || *athābravīd vānarendraḥ sugrīvaḥ putram aṅgadam* |

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3
Rāma, Sugrīva and Vālī

§1 As advised by Kabandha/Danu, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa went towards the Rśyamūka mountain. They were bearing their excellent weapons and when Sugrīva saw them, he was suspicious of them (4.2.1). He became so scared that he could not keep still, for his mind was in great turmoil (4.2.2). He said to his ministers, "I am sure these two, wearing bark-cloth, have come with bad intention, having been sent by Vālī" (4.2.6). Sugrīva then fled to another mountaintop, followed by his ministers (4.2.7).

Sugrīva said that he suspected Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to be agents of Vālī who was quite crafty; he then sent Hanumān to find out the truth about them (4.2.20–22, 25–26).

> *tau tu dṛṣṭvā mahātmānau bhrātarau rāmalakṣmanau | varāyudhadharau vīrau sugrīvaḥ śaṅkito 'bhavat || udvignahṛdayaḥ . . . na vyatiṣṭhata kasmimścid dese vānarapuṅgavaḥ || 4.2.1, 2 || etau vanam idam durgam vālīpraṇiyitau dhruvam | hadmanā cīravasanau pracarantau ihāgatau || 4.2.6 || vālīpraṇihitāvetau śaṅke'ham puruṣottamau | . . . || 4.2.20 ||*

§2 Hanumān asked Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa: «Who are you, splendid warriors, carrying bows and quivers and swords, and yet are wearing bark garments like ascetics? (4.3.6–16). Hanumān told them that Sugrīva wants to be friendly with them (4.3.20: *yuvābhyām saha sakhyam icchati*) and asked them as to why they had come to the dense forest (4.4.4: *kimartham ca vanam durgam pampākānanamaṇḍitam | āgataḥ sānujo ghoram nānāvyālamṛgāyutam* ||).

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§3 Lakṣmaṇa told Hanumān about Rāma and himself (4.4.6–10); that Rāma's wife Sītā was abducted by a rākṣasa (4.4.11) and that Danu (Kabandha) had told them that the monkey king Sugrīva would know about the abductor (4.4.13). Lakṣmaṇa told Hanumān that he and Rāma have come seeking Sugrīva's help (4.4.15). Hanumān told them that Sugrīva's elder brother Vālī had driven him (Sugrīva) out of the country and had also appropriated his wife; that Sugrīva led a frightened life in the forest; and that Sugrīva and his associates would help Rāma in the *search* for Sītā (4.4.19–20).

> *sa hi rājyāt paribhraṣṭaḥ kṛtavairaś ca Vālīā | hṛtadāro vane tyakto bhrātrā vinikṛto bhṛśam || 4.419 || kariṣyati sa sāhāyyam yuvayor bhāskarātmajaḥ | sugrīvaḥ saha cāsmābhiḥ sītāyāḥ parimārgaṇe || 4.4.20 ||*

Hanumān carried Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to the mountaintop where Sugrīva was (4.4.26).

§4 Hanumān then told Sugrīva that Rāma is the son of illustrious King Daśaratha that Rāma's wife was stolen by Rāvaṇa and that for the sake of his wife Rāma was seeking Sugrīva's friendship (4.5.6–7). Sugrīva got over his fear of Rāma and offered his hand in friendship (*vayasyatvam*), and the two swore, with fire as witness, to be friends forever (4.5.16). *(We recall Danu's advice to Rāma in 3.68.13, 17.)*

Then Rāma and Sugrīva sat and chatted with each other.

> *tato'gnim dīpyamānam tau cakratuś ca pradakṣiṇam | sugrīvo rāghavaścaiva vayasyatvam upāgatau || 4.5.16 ||*

(*Note that neither the recovery of Sītā or the search for Sītā, nor the recovery of Sugrīva's throne or wife has been mentioned at all by Rāma or Sugrīva. Many critics claim erroneously that the Rāma–Sugrīva pact entailed one or more of these items. It was only a "friendship pact", guaranteeing that neither party will become hostile to the other. (Even Hanumān, viewing it from his own point of view and because of what happened later on, thought that it was more than a mere "friendship pact", for instance that killing Vālī was part of the pact (See 5.33.47). Indeed,*

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we shall see in particular that Sugrīva did not have even the faintest notion that Rāma could kill Vālī and recover for him either the throne of Kiṣkindhā or his wife Rumā.) [70]

§5 Sugrīva, of *his own, again and again vowed to Rāma that he would restore Sītā to him*, whether she was being kept in *pātāla* or in the heavens (4.6.4, 5, 6). Sugrīva told Rāma also that he had seen Sītā being carried away by Rāvaṇa and showed him the jewels dropped by Sītā (4.6.7, 9, 13).

(*Rāma must not have taken Sugrīva's vow seriously, for he made no comment on Sugrīva's promise to restore Sītā to him; he probably viewed it as hyperbole in order to soothe him.)*

70 Many critics are in error about the pact. See for instance:
(1) Goldman: *RV* 1 p.10: "The two conclude a pact: Rāma is to help Sugrīva kill Vālī and take both his throne and his queen. In return for this, Sugrīva is to aid in the search for the lost Sītā." Similarly in Mittal and Thursby's *The Hindu World, p. 81.*
(2) *RV* 4 p.3: Lefeber says, erroneously, that there was a "dynastic struggle" between Vālī and Sugrīva.
(3) Lefeber: *RV* 4 p.3–4: Lefeber says that Rāma forged "an all–important alliance" with Sugrīva, which will insure a successful search for Sītā by all the monkey troops and that "In exchange for this assistance, Rāma must secure the kingship for Sugrīva and so he launches his alliance by killing Vālī, thus ending the rivalry of the monkey brothers."
(4) *RV* 4 p.7: "Rāma and Sugrīva form an alliance with the solemn understanding that Rāma will help Sugrīva become king while the latter will in turn mobilize all the monkeys to discover where Rāvaṇa is keeping Sītā."
(5) *RV* 4 p.45 again refers to the Rāma–Sugrīva friendship pact as an "alliance".
(6) *RV* 4 p.45 says: "Sugrīva is Rāma's ally, and Rāma has promised to dispose of Vālī in exchange for help in finding his own abducted wife."
(7) R P Goldman, in *Resisting Rāma* p.35: "Rāma argues that he had to kill Vālī since he had promised to do so as part of his agreement with Sugrīva."
(8) *RV* 4 p.40–41: "the explicit nature of the quid pro quo" (4.17.18–19; 4.8.20).
(9) *RV* 4 p.46, referring to the fire–sworn friendship between Rāma and Sugrīva, says: "[Rāma's] murder of Vālī is the inevitable outcome of that binding commitment to mutual assistance".
(10) *RV* 4 p.45: "Rāma has promised to dispose of Vālī in exchange for help in finding his own abducted wife."
(11) Lefeber in *RV* 4 translates the phrase *samaye tiṣṭha* in 4.29.48 (and in 4.30.43) as "Stand by your agreement"; but it is an idiomatic phrase meaning, "*Keep your word* ". It seems to be a reference to Sugrīva's solemn promise to make efforts so that Rāma will regain Sītā (4.7.3).
(12) P Richman (1992): *Many Rāmāyaṇas* p.6 says that according to the pact, if Rāma would help Sugrīva win back his wife and throne, then Sugrīva would aid Rāma in the search for Sītā.

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§6 After seeing the jewellery dropped by Sītā, a tearful Rāma asked Sugrīva, "Tell me, where did the rākṣasa take Sītā to? Where does he live? Because of him I shall kill all the rākṣasas!" (4.6.20–22)

(Apparently Rāma wanted only to know where Sītā had been taken to, and not that Sugrīva should restore her to him; note that he made no comment on Sugrīva's vow to restore – Sītā to him.)

§7 Sugrīva answered that he had no information about the rākṣasa (4.7.2), but again vowed to see that Rāma regains Sītā (4.7.3: *satyam tu pratijāñami . . . kariṣyāmi tathā yatnam yathā prāpsyasi maithilīm*) and to kill Rāvaṇa and his associates (4.7.4). *(We see that Sugrīva is indulging in royal hyperbole or boasting. It is highly doubtful whether he was capable of killing Rāvaṇa and his rākṣasa associates.)* He added that even though his wife too was stolen he does not grieve like Rāma; he said that Rāma also should bear things bravely (4.7.6–7–8).

(*Note*: *Sugrīva did not say that it was his brother Vālī who had stolen his wife. He seems to have been resigned to the loss of his wife and his kingdom.)*

Rāma thanked Sugrīva for his consoling words (4.7.17), but *made no comment on his promise to kill Rāvaṇa or to his repeated 'solemn' promises to restore Sītā to him.* Rāma asked instead — *for the first time* — that Sugrīva should make efforts to search for Sītā and for Rāvaṇa (4.7.18); Rāma promised to do whatever is necessary to help Sugrīva in the task (4.7.19–21).

This shows also that even a search for Sītā was not part of the Rāma–Sugrīva pact of Sarga 5; in fact, the pact makes no mention of Sītā, or of Sugrīva's wife Rumā or of Vālī or of the throne of Kiṣkindhā. It should be noted also that Rāma wanted Sugrīva only to discover where Rāvaṇa and Sītā were, even though Sugrīva had again and again said that he would bring back Sītā for Rāma after killing Rāvaṇa (4.6.4, 5; 4.7.3–4).

§8 Sugrīva said to Rāma, "With you as my friend I am sure of the blessings of the gods, and I will be able to obtain even the kingdom of the gods, not to mention my own kingdom!"(4.8.2–3)

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Sugrīva is here again indulging in royal hyperbole. He mentioned his kingdom, but not in any sense even remotely expecting Rāma to recover the kingdom for him any more than obtaining the kingdom of the gods with the help of Rāma of whose prowess he knew nothing! He mentioned his kingdom only because he mentioned the kingdom of the gods. (We shall see later that Sugrīva did not think that, for instance, Rāma was any match for Vālī and capable of wresting the kingdom from Vālī.)

§9 So far, all the characters had been standing; Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa had laid aside their weapons, and in particular, their bows were unstrung;[71] (we may assume further that they had put aside their swords.) (*Recall that Danu (Kabandha) had advised Rāma to lay aside his weapons when meeting Sugrīva (3.68.17: sannidhāya āyudham.)*

Sugrīva and Hanumān now arranged for seats for all of them (4.8.13–14).

§10 Sugrīva then told Rāma *for the first time* that Vālī had appropriated his wife (4.8.16); that ill–treated by his brother Vālī, he has been wandering in fear and sorrow in the Ṛśyamūka mountain. Rāma responded immediately, saying, "I shall very soon (4.8.20; *adyaiva* meaning: today itself; very soon) kill him who has appropriated your wife!" (4.8.20: *adyaiva tam haniṣyāmi tava bhāryāpahāriṇam*).

We should note how Rāma referred to Vālī — not by name, but as "the abductor of [Sugrīva's] wife".

It should be noted also that although Hanumān had told Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa even earlier that Vālī had stolen Sugrīva's wife, this was the first time that Sugrīva himself told so to Rāma, in the presence of Hanumān, Tāra, Naḷa and Nīla who were witnesses to what had happened in Kiṣkindhā.

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71 Pollock (*RV* 3: note on 3.68.17) claims erroneously that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa had not followed Danu's advice to lay aside their weapons when they met Sugrīva. True, the VR does not explicitly say that they had laid aside their weapons; but Rāma and Sugrīva had a chat immediately following their pact and Rāma's bow is described as "unstrung" (4.8.43). Rāma must have unstrung it, as advised by Kabandha, just before meeting Sugrīva. We may assume that Lakṣmaṇa also had unstrung his bow and that both of them had laid aside all weapons.

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Rāma told Sugrīva that he possessed extremely powerful arrows (4.8.21–22) and again vowed that he would kill Vālī (4.8.23). Sugrīva replied: "Good, good" *(4.8.24: sādhu, sādhu).*

It is to be noted that Sugrīva did not say anything about Rāma's claim about his weapons and his promise to kill Vālī "that very day" (4.8.20, 23) for, as we may guess, he did not take Rāma's words seriously; he did not at all think that Rāma was capable of vanquishing Vālī. He merely thanked Rāma for his words (4.8.24)

Sugrīva merely said, "Drowned in sorrow I opened my heart to you, my friend (4.8.25); it is because you are my friend that I told you of the sorrow tormenting me" (4.8.27).

(*We may suppose that he did not expect to recover his wife or kingdom through Rāma's help, for we shall see that he did not think Rāma was capable of helping him in the matter.)*

§11 Sugrīva continued and said that Vālī had driven him out of the kingdom, had taken over his wife too and also imprisoned his friends (4.8.31–32); that he, Sugrīva had killed many monkeys sent by Vālī to kill him (4.8.33); that his elder brother Vālī, whom he called a "great and renowned warrior", had become his enemy and that as long as Vālī is alive, there will be no end to his sorrow (4.8.37–38).

Comments: *(1) Vālī's appropriation of his brother Sugrīva's wife Rumā while Sugrīva was alive was considered to be a heinous crime for which the mandated punishment was death (see e.g. 4.18.22). Apparently, marrying a brother's widow was acceptable.*[72] *That seems to be the reason why Vālī repeatedly sought to kill Sugrīva even after the latter had been driven out of Kiṣkindhā; he chased Sugrīva (and his companions) over many countries*

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72 Indeed, the "junior levirate custom" not only allowed the union of a younger brother and the widow of his elder brother but even *required* the younger brother to marry his elder brother's widow. This custom is said to have prevailed among ancient Jews and Hindus. The verse 3.43.22 where Sītā speaks most harshly to Lakṣmaṇa, also perhaps refers to the junior levirate custom.
Lefeber's (*RV* 4 p.42) statements that "Sugrīva . . . had no true right to the kingship . . . since Vālī was alive" and "Sugrīva later appropriated Vālī's 'widow' " are not justified. See 13(3) below.

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and forests till at last Sugrīva found refuge in Ṛśyamūka which Vālī dared not enter for fear of Matanga's curse (4.12.23; 4.45.10, 16); but Vālī sent many agents into ṛśyamūka to try to kill Sugrīva (4.8.33). Vālī was keen to kill Sugrīva, for if Sugrīva was dead, Vālī's taking over Sugrīva's wife would not be considered an offence.

(2) It should be noted that Sugrīva did not ask Rāma to do anything in regard to Vālī even though Rāma had already reacted to Vālī's taking over Sugrīva's wife and said that he would kill the abductor Vālī (4.8.20, 23); Sugrīva must have felt that Vālī was exceedingly powerful, that Rāma was no match for him and that Rāma's promise to kill Vālī was only hyperbole and an expression of sympathy; Sugrīva therefore says that he felt it was no use telling Rāma all the details of his treatment by Vālī (4.8.37).

§12 Rāma, who had reacted immediately upon hearing from Sugrīva that Vālī had abducted his brother's wife, now reacted cautiously in regard to Sugrīva's other complaints against Vālī. He wanted to know more before reacting to them (4.8.41), and asked Sugrīva to narrate the true story about Vālī's enmity towards him; he assured Sugrīva, "as soon as I string my bow, your enemy is as good as dead" (4.8.43).[73] The Rāmāyaṇa says that Sugrīva then began to narrate an exact account of Vālī's enmity towards him (4.8.45: *vairasya kāranam tattvam ākhyātum upacakrame).*

Since the Rāmāyaṇa calls it an exact account, we must accept Sugrīva's narration as truthful. We also note that Danu has described Sugrīva as a nyāyavṛtta and *the Rāmāyaṇa has already described Sugrīva as "dharmātmā" in (4.2.4), tejasvī" in (4.5.18) and "mahātmā" in (4.3.1); (also in 4.11.50, 4.12.28 etc).* [74]

73 It is clear that the bow had been unstrung for a while – from the time Rāma met Sugrīva.

74 (a) 4.28.27 refers to Sugrīva as *sattvasampannah; the translation by the commentator Lefeber in RV4 as "mighty Sugrīva"* is not acceptable.
(b) Totally ignoring the heavenly being Danu's praise of Sugrīva as virtuous and the Rāmāyaṇa's introduction of Sugrīva's narration as truthful and accurate, Masson (1975: p. 674a) indulging in vituperative, unscholarly language says: "To put it bluntly: the story stinks!" (If anything stinks, it is Masson's numerous errors, muddling of names, his resort almost entirely to passages that have been rejected by the CE, although he cites the CE in his bibliography and his taking passages out of context and misrepresenting them and his babbling about applying psychoanalysis –

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§13 Sugrīva then narrated the incidents that led to the enmity. He said that the powerful asura Māyāvin had challenged Vālī, but then fled in fear and sought refuge in a cavern, which Vālī entered in angry pursuit (4.9.12–13).

(Māyāvin's enmity towards Vālī seems to be because Vālī had done something to Māyāvin's wife; perhaps Vālī had abducted her. See 4.9.4, which describes the cause as "well-known" and "strīkṛtam" [for the sake of a woman].)

Sugrīva had stood waiting for Vālī to come out, but Vālī did not do so for more than a year. Vālī's counsellors, deeming Vālī to be dead, made Sugrīva ascend the throne of Kiṣkindhā (4.9.20). Sugrīva then took Tārā also as a wife.

Comments: (1) For it is dangerous for a kingdom to be without a king. (See e.g. 2.61.7ff; 4.19.15–16) it is surprising that Vālī's counsellors did not consecrate Sugrīva much earlier — Sugrīva must have resisted their efforts to consecrate him.[75] Vālī's son Aṅgada was too young to be chosen to succeed his father. (He was still only a boy even when Rāma came to ṛśyamūka: see 4.22.8.) (Even the U-K, which is not really a part of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, says that when Vālī was crowned king, Sugrīva was chosen as the Prince-Regent. (See U-K 36.37))

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all of which contribute to the scholarly incompetence in his paper. It is unfortunate that some later scholars have uncritically accepted Masson's faulty assertions and presented them to the general public.
For instance the commentator R P Goldman (1984: *RV* 1, p.10) calls Sugrīva's story "a curious tale" and "a self-serving account that has a number of inconsistencies" (1984: *RV* 5 p. 73; 2004: *Resisting Rāma,* in *Rāmāyaṇa Revisited* p.43 n.69). He does not give any instance of an inconsistency, but merely says: "See Masson 1975"; but Masson cites no inconsistency either! Shulman (1979: p.654) echoes Masson's claims.

75 (a) V S S Sastri (1944: p.218) said that Sugrīva was too hasty in accepting his brother's throne. It was shown that there is no Vālīdity to this accusation. Masson (1975: p.674b, n.10), who cites V S S Sastri, and Shulman (1979: p.654) repeat the accusation. R P Goldman (2004: p. 43 n.69) cites and echoes Masson. (b) The discussion presented in the text shows that the commentator Lefeber's remark (1994: *RV* 4, p. 42) that "Sugrīva had no right to the kingship [when he was made king in Vālī's absence]" is quite erroneous.

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(2) Sugrīva says that Vālī's counsellors forced him to ascend the throne. We must note that later, when Vālī lay dying, Sugrīva's minister Hanumān, no doubt conveying Sugrīva's wish, told Tārā to get Vālī's son Aṅgada be consecrated as Vālī's successor (4.21.11). This shows that Sugrīva had no desire to resume kingship. Recall that after Vālī disappeared without a trace into Māyāvin's underground stronghold, for one whole year and more, Sugrīva showed no interest to becoming king; Vālī's ministers, no doubt aware of the dangers for a kingdom without a king, had him consecrated as their king (as Sugrīva said in 4.9.20). Vālī's son Aṅgada was too young to be made the king.

(3) Following the junior levirate custom, which was prevalent among ancient societies and is still not quite extinct (see Deuteronomy 25.6, also the practice of niyoga), Sugrīva was in fact obliged to take Tara, legally deemed a widow, as his wife. Not understanding the levirate custom, many critics accuse Sugrīva of "appropriating" Tara when in fact Vālī was still alive and fighting Māyāvin in the cavern.[76] *But there had been no sign of Vālī being alive for over a year, and therefore his counsellors rightly deemed him as legally dead. We should note that Harivaṁśa 1.28.15–30 and Viṣṇupurāṇa 4.13.36–58 say that when Krishna fought with a bear, inside a cave, and did not come out for three weeks, his attendants presumed that he had been killed by the bear and returned home. In modern days, we have the instance of the American aviator Fossett who was missing for four months, and the courts declared him as "legally dead". We see thus that the accusations of Sugrīva by some critics regarding his becoming the king of Kiṣkindhā and marrying Tārā have to be rejected. (For the accusations by some critics, see e.g. RV4: p.40, p.42. We recall also that the Rāmāyaṇa speaks highly of Sugrīva's morals and character (e.g. 4.2.4; 4.15.1; 6.40.20: sattvasampannaḥ).*

76 Masson (1975: p.674) makes the misleading statement that Sugrīva's first act after he covered with a rock the cavern into which Māyāvin and Vālī had disappeared was to take over the throne of Kiṣkindhā and Tārā too. Shulman (1979) echoes Masson. Lefeber (1984: *RV*4, p.42) similarly makes the erroneous statement that Sugrīva "appropriated" Tārā, Vālī's wife. It may be noted that while Lefeber claims that Sugrīva "appropriated" Tārā, she says that when Vālī returned after he was deemed dead due to his more than a year's absence, he "not only repossessed his own wife but took Sugrīva's wife as well" (p.42); she does not say that Vālī appropriated the wife of his living brother! Compare the statement of R P Goldman and Sally Goldman in *RV*5 p. 73: "Vālī has, through his wrongful and adulterous appropriation of Sugrīva's wife, forfeited his claim to the throne and even his life".

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Indeed, Sugrīva was the legitimate king of Kiṣkindhā when Vālī drove him out of the kingdom and usurped the throne. Therefore, Vālī was not the legitimate king when Rāma met Sugrīva. (Thus the contrary claim by the commentator Lefeber in RV4 p.40, repeated by her on p.42, has to be rejected.)

§14 Sugrīva again said that Vālī had abducted his wife, and that afraid of Vālī, he had been wandering all over the world till at last he found refuge in the Ṛśyamūka , where Vālī dare not come for a certain reason (4.10.23). He requested Rāma to restrain Vālī (4.10.25).[77] *Again, as soon as he heard* that Vālī had appropriated Sugrīva's wife, Rāma again said, "Vālī, *the abductor of your wife*, shall remain alive only as long as that sinful violator of chastity does not come within my sight" (4.10.28).[78]

Comments: This is the ***third*** *time that Rāma vows to kill Vālī: each time it was when Sugrīva had just then told him that his wife had been appropriated by Vālī (see 4.8.16–18/20, 23; 4.8.31–38/43; 4.10.22–25/28); and Rāma declares that he will kill Vālī, whom he repeatedly refers to as the abductor of Sugrīva's wife. The words now used by Rāma make it clear that his decision to kill Vālī was because Vālī was a sinful violator of women's chastity (4.10.28: cāritradūṣakaḥ), as shown for instance by his (Vālī's) abduction of Sugrīva's wife.*

But Sugrīva did not consider Rāma was capable of killing Vālī! See the discussion further below.

Later, Rāma tells Vālī why he shot the fatal arrow at him; Rāma tells him repeatedly that it was because he (Vālī) had taken over Sugrīva's wife (4.18.18, 19, 20) and that death was the mandated punishment for the crime – a punishment that he was obliged to carry out in obedience to

77 Sugrīva requested Rāma for the nigraha (=keep in check, restrain) of Vālī (4.10.25). He did not ask for Vālī to be killed, for he did not wish him to be killed, even though Rāma had repeatedly said that he would kill Vālī as soon as he saw him. We should note also that Sugrīva did not at all think that Rāma could overcome Vālī, as the discussion presented further below shows. Sugrīva probably thought that Rāma, son of the illustrious King Daśaratha, might be able to persuade Vālī to relent and not continue to seek to kill him.

78 Rāma refers to Vālī as *cāritradūṣaka* – 'violator of women's chastity'; Lefeber's translation of it (in *RV4*) as 'violator of all decency' is far too weak to be acceptable.

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Bharata, the king (4.18.22–25). This shows also that Rāma's killing Vālī had nothing to do with restoring Sugrīva's wife or kingship, or to the Rāma–Sugrīva pact (that is, to his friendship with Sugrīva).

§15 Sugrīva seems to have been quite annoyed at Rāma saying repeatedly that he would kill Vālī. For one thing, he did not think that Rāma had the ability to do so. Besides, Sugrīva's desire was not that Vālī should be killed, but only that Vālī should be "restrained" (see 4.10.25).[79] To Rāma, who had again and again praised his arrows as very powerful and will enable him to easily kill Vālī (4.8.21–22; 4.10.27–28), we see that Sugrīva said with undisguised sarcasm, "No doubt with your mighty arrows you could burn up all the three worlds, but let me tell you what Vālī is capable of" (4.11.2–3). Then Sugrīva spoke of Vālī's strength and also of the Dundubhi incident; and that Vālī was capable of denuding a huge sāla tree of all its leaves. Sugrīva ended by asking Rāma, "O King, how then will you be able to kill Vālī in battle?" (4.11.48).*(Earlier, Sugrīva had addressed Rāma only by name, or as "Rāghava"; his addressing Rāma now as "O King!" is also indicative of his sarcasm.)*

§16 In order to impress Rāma the great might of Vālī, Sugrīva showed him the skeleton of Dundubhi; Vālī had killed the mighty asura Dundubhi and thrown his body over a distance of a league; Sugrīva showed Rāma also a mighty sāla tree and said that Vālī could denude it by use of a single arrow (4.11.47). So saying, Sugrīva openly expressed his disbelief at Rāma's repeated claim that he could vanquish Vālī (4.11.48). Then Rāma with his toe kicked Dundubhi's skeleton over a distance of ten leagues; but Sugrīva was still not convinced that Rāma's claim that he could overcome Vālī; for he said to Rāma, "When Vālī flung Dundubhi's body, it was full of flesh and blood; now it has neither and has become

79 *RV* 4, p.42 makes the confused statement: "Sugrīva repeatedly begs Rāma to eliminate the threat from Vālī whom he is too weak to kill himself but who, as the first-born son, is the legitimate king." The statement implies that Sugrīva wanted Vālī to be killed (by Rāma). There is no evidence for this. Also, Sugrīva did not at all think (till Rāma pierced the leaves of the seven sāla trees with his arrow) that Rāma was capable of defeating Vālī. Lefeber's statement says also that Sugrīva was not the legitimate king when Vālī drove him out of Kiṣkindhā. But Sugrīva had been legitimately enthroned by Vālī's own ministers (4.9.20), when Vālī had disappeared without trace for more than one year and was deemed by them to be dead.

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light as straw. Therefore one cannot say whether you or Vālī is stronger" (4.11.52). And pointing at seven huge *sāla* trees, Sugrīva added, "Vālī can with a single arrow denude one of these trees. Can you split the trees with an arrow?"

§17 In order to inspire confidence in Sugrīva, Rāma then shot an arrow, which split all the seven *sāla* trees, pierced the earth and then in an instant returned to Rāma's quiver. Sugrīva at last became convinced that Rāma had the power to vanquish Vālī. He said to Rāma, "With your arrows you are capable of killing even Indra and all the Devas! There is no need to say anything about Vālī" (4.12.8).

But it is not clear whether Sugrīva really wanted Vālī to be killed, but he knew that Rāma had repeatedly sworn to kill Vālī. He prayed to Rāma, "Please defeat (*jahi*) Vālī this very day!" (4.12.11: *tam adyaiva . . . Vālīam jahi kākutstha mayā baddho'yam anjalih ||).*[80] *(Note the word* jahi: "overcome, defeat".) *It is Rāma who has repeatedly said that he would kill Vālī, for he felt that it his duty to inflict the death penalty on Vālī for his incestuous behaviour.*

§18 Rāma said to Sugrīva, "Let us now go straight to Kishkindhā; when we reach there, you should challenge Vālī, who is your brother in name only." When they reached near the gates of Kiṣkindhā, they hid themselves behind trees, and Sugrīva let out a roar challenging Vālī (4.12.14–15). Vālī came out of the gates of Kiṣkindhā in great anger and there ensued a bitter fight between Vālī and Sugrīva. (Note: *The Rāmāyaṇa does not say that Sugrīva had come out of hiding; but it is obvious that he must have.)* Rāma, who wanted to shoot an arrow at Vālī did not do so, as the two monkey brothers were so alike that he could not distinguish between them (4.12.19–20).[81] Badly beaten by Vālī, and with Rāma not

80 Lefeber in *RV*4 makes an error, translating the word *jahi* as *kill.*

81 Unfortunately some commentators like Govindarāja and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, as well as V S S Sastri (1944: p.153) overlooked the clear statement in the Rāmāyaṇa which says that Vālī and Sugrīva were so similar in appearance, like the twin gods, the Aśvini devas, that Rāma could not distinguish Sugrīva from Vālī (4.12.19) (during their first fight). Masson (1975: p.675, n.17) wrongly says that Sugrīva ran towards Rāma at the end of the fight and seems to refer, with a sneer, to Rāma's claim that he could not distinguish between Vālī and Sugrīva.

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entering into the fight, Sugrīva gave up the fight and fled, bleeding and pursued by Vālī till he (Sugrīva) entered the Ṛśyamūka forest;[82] afraid of Matanga's curse, Vālī gave up his pursuit of his brother (4.12.21–23).[83]

Some critics have used this incident to make the absurd claim that Sugrīva was a coward.[84]

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82 V S S Sastri (1944: p.153), and Masson (1975: p.675, n.17) who cites Sastri, have said erroneously that Sugrīva ran towards Rāma after the first fight with Vālī; their statements are contrary to what the Rāmāyaṇa says: that Sugrīva simply fled into the Ṛśyamūka forest (4.12.21–22); it is Rāma who later goes and meets with him (4.12.24).

83 Masson (1975: p.676a), and following him Shulman (1979: p.654) make the baseless claim that Sugrīva was a coward and that Vālmīki portrays Vālī as heroic, magnanimous, forgiving and noble. Lefeber (*RV* 4: p. 40) calls Vālī a "super–hero"! As a fighter he suffered a humiliating defeat in his second fight with Sugrīva; his limbs were thoroughly shattered and he was staggering like an overburdened boat at sea, while Sugrīva remained quite agile (4.16.22, 24; 4.19.2). We note also that the Rāmāyaṇa says that Daśaratha's soldiers would not attack one who flees (1.5.20); Rāma cautioned Lakṣmaṇa not to attack those who are fleeing or have given up fighting (6.67.38). When he had rendered Hanumān quite stupefied, Rāvaṇa discontinued attacking him and went on to fight against Nīla (6.47.65–66), and after Nīla was also rendered stupefied, Rāvaṇa went to fight against Lakṣmaṇa (6.47.88). Vālmīki says that Atikāya (Rāvaṇa's son) would not attack anyone who was not fighting him (6.59.43). After completely disarming the rakṣasa Kumbha, Sugrīva did not proceed to kill him, as to do so would ruin his reputation, but offered to let him rest and recoup his strength (6,63.35, 44). Vālī on the contrary angrily pursued the demon Māyāvin as the latter was fleeing in terror; Vālī angrily pursued also his own wounded and bleeding younger brother Sugrīva, as he was fleeing from him after their first fight and gave up his chase only out of fear of Mātaṅga's curse (4.12.23). The Rāmāyaṇa's calling Vālī a *mahābalaḥ*, that is, as "mighty" can only be criticism or sarcasm. Manusmṛti verses 7.91–93 are very explicit on the principle involved here. Contrary to what Lefeber, Masson and Shulman have said, Vālī was in fact not at all heroic, magnanimous, forgiving or noble.
The Rāmāyaṇa does not itself specifically say that Vālī was a great fighter; it is only Sugrīva who is described as a great warrior (4.16.17: *raṇapaṇḍita*), as *tejasvī (4.5.18)*. In the Yuddhakāṇḍa, Rāvaṇa's spy Śārdūla refers to Sugrīva as "invincible in battle" (6.21.20: *yudhi . . . sudurjayaḥ);* Kumbhakarṇa says that Sugrīva's valour was well known *(6.55.42: śrutapauruṣasampannaḥ);* Rāvaṇa himself speaks highly of Sugrīva's valour (5.44.10). *The only qualities of Vālī that the Rāmāyaṇa describes are his vanity and propensity to get intensely angry; no one can be called a hero who has those qualities and who usurped the wife of his living brother, drove him out of the country, and then pursued him relentlessly in order to kill him. As Vālī himself acknowledged as he lay dying, he was known to be a flagrant violator of righteousness (4.18.44: Vālī says: "māmapy avagatam dharmād vyatikrāntapuraskṛtam | ").*

84 As part of his attempt to portray Sugrīva in a bad light, Masson (1975: p. 676b) claims that Sugrīva was a coward. Although he cites the CE in his paper, he makes the claim based on verses that have been rejected by the CE. Following Masson faithfully,

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§19 Rāma went, with Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān, and consoled Sugrīva. Saying that he could not distinguish between Vālī and Sugrīva when they were fighting, he asked Lakṣmaṇa to fasten a blossoming creeper around Sugrīva's neck, so that one can easily distinguish between Vālī and Sugrīva (4.12.34–36). Then all of them again went towards Kiṣkindhā; and concealed themselves behind the trees (4.14.1); Sugrīva *summoned up* his anger (4.14.2: *krodham āhārayat*) and let out a roar, but Rāma did not think it was loud enough (4.14.15). *Perhaps Sugrīva was sad that Vālī was going to be killed/vanquished very soon for he had grown up with feeling of love and respect towards his elder brother; that is why perhaps he had to "summon up" anger towards Vālī and his roar was not quite loud.* Sugrīva was then urged by Rāma to let out a very loud roar (4.14.18).

§20 When he heard Sugrīva's second, loud roar, Vālī could not bear it and was "filled with great rage" (4.15.1–2). "His body filled with fury, he was like a blazing fire because of his anger" (4.15.3, 4). Tara tried to calm him down and pleaded with him not to go and fight with Sugrīva, and that he should at once consecrate Sugrīva as the heir apparent. She warned him also that Sugrīva was accompanied by Rāma who was not only virtuous but was also harsh in battle. *(Perhaps Tara was suggesting that Rāma was accompanying Sugrīva, as his support, because the latter had been grievously wronged by Vālī who had appropriated Rumā.)*

Vālī came out of the gates of Kiṣkindhā "in a fiery rage and hissing like a big angry snake", in order to fight Sugrīva (4.16.11, 12). He was in a

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Shulman (1979: p. 654, note 7) also claims that Sugrīva was a coward, on the basis of a verse which is rejected by the CE (like the verses cited by Masson).
It is amazing that Masson and Shulman, writing several years after the Critical Edition of Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa was published, again and again resort to verses rejected by the CE, and at the same time ignore the vast amount of evidence otherwise available in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa and which contradict their claims. Masson even cites the CE in the bibliography of his paper but chooses to ignore it. It is amazing that Masson repeatedly mistakes one person for another, and Shulman mistakes one text for another! It is even more amazing that scholars have not till now pointed any errors in the many wrong claims made by Masson and Shulman, but cite their papers in their own work, accepting their erroneous statements as correct.

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"towering rage" and his eyes were "copper-red with anger" (4.16.14, 17). Then Vālī began the battle by attacking Sugrīva with such force that Sugrīva vomited blood, which flowed like a waterfall from a mountain, and became very angry (4.16.20).[85]

§21 The Rāmāyaṇa takes special care to describe Sugrīva, just before the fight, as a "highly skilled fighter" (4.16.17: "raṇapaṇḍita"), foretelling Sugrīva's victory in the battle which followed. When Vālī attacked Sugrīva with great force and made him vomit blood, Sugrīva became very angry (4.16.20) and started fighting ferociously. Vālī's main characteristics were his vanity and anger. He refers to himself as an invincible warrior (4.16.3); the Rāmāyaṇa repeatedly refers to his towering rage, even before his fight with Sugrīva began.[86]

§22 The Rāmāyaṇa says that Vālī, Sugrīva and Hanumān were fathered by Indra, Sūrya-deva and Vāyu-deva respectively; in addition, millions of other great monkeys were fathered by other devas and celestial beings and they were all capable of taking any form at will. In turn, these monkeys fathered still more heroic monkeys who were also well versed in the use of all weapons (1.16.9-16).[87] Sugrīva's monkey army contained many ordinary monkeys also.

Coming back to the Sugrīva-Vālī encounter:

§23 It was a fierce fight. Finally, when Sugrīva uprooted a tree and struck Vālī on the limbs (4.16.21), Vālī staggered and lurched like a boat at sea overwhelmed by a heavy load (4.16.22); he was drenched in blood (4.16.27), for his limbs had been completely shattered by the blows

85 *Sargas* 15 and 16 give us reliable information about Vālī: his vanity and anger! See the next note.

86 See 4.9.22; 4.10.1 where Sugrīva refers to Vālī's anger - VR: 4.11.37 (*samkruddha)*, 4.12.16 (*kruddha)*, 4.15.2 (*krodhaścāpatito mahān)*, 4.15.3: (*roṣaparītāṅgo vālī*), 4.15.4 (*krodhāt dīptāgnisannibhaḥ), 4.15.7:* (Tārā to Vālī: *sādhu krodham imam vīra nadīvegam ivāgatam*), 4.16.11 (*kruddho mahāsarpam iva śvasan)*, 4.16.12 and 14 (*vālī paramaroṣaṇaḥ)*, 4.16.17 *(vālī krodhatāmrākṣaḥ*).

87 Lefeber (*RV*4: p. 43) errs enormously in saying that the *vānaras* were of "lowly nature" and "scarcely worthy" to be allies of Rāma.

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from stones and trees (4.19.2).[88] Although tired, Sugrīva remained agile (4.16.24).[89]

The Vālī–Sugrīva battle had reached a crucial point. Vālī's limbs had been crushed, and Sugrīva, who remained agile, could have easily dealt him a fatal blow. (But he would not continue to fight against an enemy who had been disabled. Being virtuous, he could never deal a fatal blow to his brother. As Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa who suspected that Bharata was approaching Citrakūṭa with evil intent, "How could a son ever kill his father or a brother kill his brother, his very own breath of life?"(2.91.6: katham nu putrāḥ pitaram hanyuḥ kasyāmcid āpadi | bhrātā vā bhrātaram hanyāt saumitre prāṇam ātmanaḥ ||)

At this point Rāma felled Vālī to the ground with an arrow (4.16.26).[90] That arrow was fatal for Vālī. (By shooting the fatal arrow at Vālī, Rāma carried out his promise to give the death punishment to Vālī; it proved to be also to be euthanasia for the severely crippled monkey; incidentally, Rāma's action perhaps prevented even the remotest chance of fratricide by Sugrīva.)[91]

88 Although verse 4.16.27 occurs after 4.16.25, which speaks about Rāma shooting an arrow at Vālī, the blood was not from the wound caused by the arrow. Blood from that wound would have flowed only after the arrow was pulled out by Nīla much later (4.23.17).

89 Danu had described Sugrīva as agile (3.67.30; *laghuvikramaḥ; Pollock (RV3) omits to translate the word).*

90 It should be noted that Rāma shot his arrow at Vālī only when the battle between Vālī and Sugrīva had in fact ceased.

91 Why did Rāma shoot the fatal arrow at Vālī? Lefeber (*RV* 4: p.37; again on p.45) erroneously claims that Rāma had agreed to kill Vālī in exchange for help in finding Sītā. She refers to Rāma's killing of Vālī as "murder" and claims, erroneously, referring to the fire–sworn Rāma–Sugrīva pact: "[Rāma's] murder of Vālī is the outcome of that binding commitment to mutual assistance" (*RV*4: p. 46). Some other academics also, like Masson (1975: p.677a) and P Richman (1992: *Many Rāmāyaṇas*: p.20, n.21), erroneously call it a "murder".
But the Rāma–Sugrīva friendship pact had nothing to do with "mutual assistance" or with the killing Vālī. Also, "murder" means illegal, pre–meditated killing due to malice. But Rāma had no malice towards Vālī; Rāma killed Vālī only to administer the mandated punishment for Vālī's crime of usurping his brother Sugrīva's wife; Rāma was obliged to do so as deputy of Bharata.

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§24 *Vālī, whose vanity was great, did not want to admit that he had already lost his battle with Sugrīva even before Rāma shot the arrow at him.* Vālī said to Rāma, "You have killed me when I was in the heat of battle with someone else and was not looking [at you] (4.17.13)." Then Vālī made a series of charges against Rāma and Rāma answered them; in particular:

(1) Vālī said that he, Vālī, had committed no crime in Rāma's kingdom, nor had offended Rāma in any way and was an innocent creature and that Rāma had acted capriciously (4.17.20, 29–30–31). Rāma's answer to this charge was that all the land and forests etc. belonged to Bharata and as Bharata's deputy it was his duty to punish whoever violates righteousness (4.18.6–7, 9, 11) and that he, Vālī, had acted unrighteously (4.18.12). Rāma said that the crime of incest committed by Vālī is contrary to *dharma* and to universal customs and laws, and that the punishment prescribed for it is death. (Each of the verses 4.18.20–22 drives home this point.) *Rāma had told Bharata that he, Rāma, would function as the ruler of the beasts of the forest (2.99.17).* It was therefore his *duty* to kill Vālī, for death is the prescribed punishment for one who, like Vālī, out of lust approaches his younger brother's wife (4.18.22). Rāma said to Vālī that his killing him was not due to any personal whim or caprice, (as Vālī, in 4.17.28–30 had charged it was), and that he was obliged to carry out of what has been laid down by law (4.18.33: *dharmataḥ parikalpitaḥ . . . na vayaṃ svavaśe sthitāḥ*).

It should be noted that at this point Rāma refers to himself in the plural (vayam); he does so only in the few verses (4.18.9, 11, 23, 25, 33) in the sarga, where he refers to himself not as an individual but as a deputy who is obliged to carry out duties assigned to him by Bharata, and who is therefore obliged to punish those who stray from the path of righteousness (4.18.9, 11, 23, 25). (The commentator Lefeber (RV 4) completely misses this point.)

(We may recall at this point the following: The ascetics in the Daṇḍaka forest told Rāma that it was his duty to protect them (3.1.20; 3.5.18). That is, Rāma's duty as deputy for Bharata extended to the forests also and he

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was duty-bound to punish those who violate righteousness, or commit crimes like incest.)

(2) Vālī claimed that he was unassailable in battle and would have killed Rāma if Rāma had fought openly and that he was struck down where Rāma could not be seen (4.17.39–40).

Vālī's words reveal his vanity; after all, he had been soundly defeated by Sugrīva. He had known that Rāma was there, and had purposely ignored his presence. He says that he was purposely a parāṅmukha, that is, did not look directly at Rāma (4.17.13); he had intended it to be a clever tactic, as is indicated by his phrase " iti me buddhir utpannā"*(4.17.17)* (The commentator Lefeber's translation of it in *RV4* as "I had no idea . . ." is not correct). *He had thought that if he was not looking directly at Rāma then Rāma would not attack him. It should be noted that the Rāmāyaṇa does not say that Rāma was hidden when he shot the arrow; true, it does not say that Rāma had come out of hiding; but it does not say that Sugrīva had come out of hiding either, and obviously he had come out of hiding to fight Val; and if Rāma was in hiding, why would Vālī have chosen to be a "parāṅmukha"?*

(3) Vālī claimed that he could have recovered Sītā and could have given Rāvaṇa, bound around the neck to Rāma; he further accused Rāma of killing him in order to please Sugrīva (4.17.41–42).

Again, we see how vain Vālī was. The Rāmāyaṇa contains no evidence that Vālī could so subdue Rāvaṇa. (Some critics, who do not want to accept that the so-called "U-K" is not really a part of the Rāmāyaṇa, will say that the U-K says that Vālī is much stronger than Rāvaṇa; but it says also that they were fire-sworn friends, sworn to share everything!)

Vālī seems to have thought that Rāma killed him in order to get Sugrīva's help in recovering Sītā.

Rāma's answer was that his friendship with Sugrīva was "just like his friendship with Lakṣmaṇa" (4.18.26). *That is, his friendship with Sugrīva was not based on any "quid pro quo".* (Thus we cannot accept the statements of the commentators R P Goldman (*RV* 1: p. 10) and Lefeber

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(*RV* 4, p. 41) on this point.) Rāma continued, "Further, I had made a promise in the presence of other monkeys. How can someone like me disregard it? "(4.18.27)

Rāma had just said that he was carrying out Bharata's commands (4.18.22–25) and was now referring to his vow, made as soon as Sugrīva, in the presence of Hanumān, Tāra, Naḷa and Nīla) said that Vālī had appropriated his wife (4.8.20: tam haniṣyāmi tava bhāryāpahāriṇam). Rāma had again made the same vow (4.10.28). Therefore, even if he now wanted to show mercy to Vālī, he cannot; for he must not only fulfil his vow, but, as deputy of King Bharata, had to carry out the mandated death punishment to Vālī. Thus, we see again that the killing of Vālī had nothing to do with the Rāma–Sugrīva friendship pact. Thus the statements of many critics, including R P Goldman (2004: In "Rāmāyaṇa Revisited'; 'Resisting Rāma, p.35), Lefeber (RV4) and many Indian critics that Rāma argued that he had to kill Vālī as part of his agreement with Sugrīva, are seen to be erroneous. The critics mistakenly think that according to the Rāma–Sugrīva pact, Rāma had to kill Vālī in return for Sugrīva's help in locating Sītā. But the pact did not involve these items at all. And, as Rāma makes it clear, his friendship with Sugrīva is like his friendship with Lakṣmaṇa – that is, no quid pro quo is involved (4.18.26).

(4) Vālī said there was no reason for Rāma to kill him, a mere forest–dwelling creature whose flesh and skin are of no use to anybody (4.17.26, 33–35).

Rāma's reply to Vālī to the point raised by him: "Even royal seers, who fully understand righteousness, hunt animals in the forest, whether they fight back or not" (4.18.36).[92] *Rāma's reply has been misunderstood by some critics. (See e.g.: Lefeber 1994, p. 45) Rāma was not speaking disparagingly of monkeys as mere animals. It was Vālī who said he was a mere animal and Rāma merely replied to him on that point, at the same level as raised by Vālī. We know that Rāma had the greatest regard for the monkeys Sugrīva and Hanumān and has embraced them most*

92 *In regard to 4.18.36, one may note: The MBh Ādiparva: pāṇḍu–mṛgaśāpa , 117th adhyāya, śloka 17 gives Pāṇḍu's words: pramattam apramattam vā vivṛtam ghnanti caujasā | upāyair vividhair tīkṣṇaiḥ kasmā mṛga vigarhase ||*

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affectionately. No creature, whether man or woman, bird or monkey was looked down upon by Rāma.

Vālī's words in (4) are in strong contrast to his boastful words in (2) and (3) above! And he completely overlooks his sinful appropriation of Sugrīva's wife. It looks as if he had no realization that he had done anything wrong.

§26 Vālī knew that Sugrīva had come with Rāma; Tara had already cautioned him (4.15.15–18). Vālī had therefore decided, as a clever tactic, to be a parāṅmukha (4.17.13) and not look directly at Rāma while fighting against Sugrīva (4.17.17); for he felt sure that Rāma would not attack him while he was fighting Sugrīva. Indeed, Rāma shot the arrow at Vālī only after Vālī had been crippled in his fight with Sugrīva: Vālī was lurching like an overloaded boat at sea (4.16.22) and his limbs had been completely shattered by stones (4.19.2) and the Vālī–Sugrīva fight was in fact over.

But the point is, Rāma shot the arrow at Vālī only after Vālī was crippled and the Vālī–Sugrīva fight was over.

§27 Vālī's claim (4.17.41) that he could have captured and brought Rāvaṇa to Rāma is pure boast; nothing in the Rāmāyaṇa suggests that he had that much strength and power.[93] It is amazing that the commentator Lefeber (1994 p. 40) says that Vālī was a "super–hero" who, if requested by Rāma, could have helped him regain Sītā! But the critic overlooks (1) the fact that Vālī was no hero and (2) that there was no reason why Vālī who had usurped his brother Sugrīva's wife while the brother was still alive would care to help in the case of Rāma's wife who was abducted by Rāvaṇa. Besides, as protector of dharma, Rāma had sworn to administer the death punishment to Vālī for usurping Sugrīva's wife. So, he would certainly not ask for Vālī's help.

93 *Some critics appeal to the U–K wherein it is said that once Vālī easily held Rāvaṇa as a captive; but they ignore that soon after, the U–K adds that Rāvaṇa profusely praised Vālī and, offering to share everything, including wives and sons, sought Vālī's friendship (sakhyam) and that Rāvaṇa and Vālī embraced each other and swore friendship with fire as witness (U–K 34.38–40).*

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§28 Was Rāma hidden when he shot the arrow at *Vālī?*

A number of critics have claimed that Rāma was hidden when he shot the arrow at Vālī. (See: Masson (1975, p.672b); Goldman, 1984 pp.10, 67; Lefeber, 1994 pp.7, 45, 46; Richman, 1992: p. 7; Shulman, 1992: p.89.) They all depend on verse 4.14.1 which says that when Rāma, Sugrīva, Hanumān, Naḷa, Nīla and Tāra came near the gates of Kiṣkindhā, they hid themselves behind trees, and then Sugrīva let out a challenging roar (4.14.3).[94] It was a little later that Vālī came out of Kiṣkindhā and saw Sugrīva standing ready for a fight (4.16.13); this means that Sugrīva was no longer hidden by the trees, although the Rāmāyaṇa however does not say so explicitly. (This was the case just before each of the two Vālī–Sugrīva fights.) At the end of the second Sugrīva–Vālī fight, – after Vail had been crippled – Rāma shot an arrow at Vālī. There is no evidence whatever that he was hidden when he did so; on the other hand, Vālī said he had been deliberately a *parāṅmukha, that is, looking away (4.17.13). This suggests that Rāma was not hidden.*

One can guess why Rāma and his companions at first hid themselves behind the trees, on each occasion when they came near Kiṣkindhā. If Rāma, Sugrīva and their companions were all visible for the guards at the gates of Kiṣkindhā, then Sugrīva's roar would have been interpreted not as a personal challenge between Sugrīva and Vālī, but as an attack on Kiṣkindhā itself. Then Rāma could not have carried out the death punishment for Vālī without killing many innocent vānaras of Kiṣkindhā.

§29 Why did Rāma shoot the fatal arrow at Vālī? Was it murder?

As Rāma repeatedly tells Vālī, he did so for one and only one reason: Vālī had abducted the wife of his living brother (4.18.18, 19, 20) and death was the mandated punishment for the crime (4.18.22). As wise Tārā said to Vālī as he lay dying, "This is the fruit you harvest for taking over Sugrīva's wife and exiling him" (4.20.11).

Tara knew that Rāma's wife had been stolen and that Sugrīva had promised to look for her; yet she did not say that Rāma killed Vālī

94 See V S S Sastri 1949: rpt. 1979, p.139; Masson 1975: p.672; Shulman 1979, p. 654; R P Goldman *RV*1: p.10; Lefeber *RV*4, p. 45; p.46; p.50, n.172; p.249, note on 4.19.12.

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because of, or in return for, Sugrīva's promise of help in the matter of Sītā. She correctly says that it was Vālī's appropriation of Rumā that had brought about his death.

There is no justification to say as Masson (1975, p. 672, 673b), Lefeber (1984, p. 46) and P Richman (1992, p.20, n.21) do, that Rāma murdered Vālī. We must note also that the word "murder" means pre-meditated killing due to malice.

§30 Did Rāma shoot him in the back?

The Rāmāyaṇa says very clearly that Rāma's arrow struck Vālī in the chest (4.16.25: rāghaveṇa mahābāṇo vālīvakṣasi pātitaḥ). (The American professor W Doniger (2009, pp. 236, 237) repeatedly says that Vālī was shot in the back; Prof P Richman (2001, p.6) also makes the same wrong statement.

§31 When Rāma shot the arrow, were Vālī and Sugrīva engaged in fighting?

No, their fight had in fact ended; Vālī had been crippled, but Sugrīva was agile and a further attack by Sugrīva would have killed Vālī; it was then that Rāma shot the arrow.[95] It was only in order to carry out the death sentence on Vālī for having appropriated his living brother Sugrīva's wife Rumā. Rāma would certainly not attack even his worst enemy when the enemy was already crippled, as Vālī was, or even when the enemy had been rendered weak. We should note the following: when in his fight against Rāvaṇa, the asura's chariot and horses as well as bow and other weapons were all destroyed, Rāma stopped his attacks on him and allowed him to return to Laṅkā and return after he was rested and fully armed (6.47.127–132). Overlooking these facts, many critics — both medieval and modern — have made invalid criticisms of Rāma.[96]

95 Thus, we cannot accept what many critics have said: that Vālī was engaged in hand-to-hand fight with Sugrīva when Rama shot his arrow. (See e.g. Govindaraja; P Goldman: *RV*1: p.10; Lefeber: *RV*4, p. 45)

96 E.g. R P Goldman (*RV*1: p. 10) and Lefeber (*RV*4, p. 45) say that Rāma was hidden when he shot the arrow and that Vālī and Sugrīva were at that moment engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Echoing K S Ramaswamy Sastri (p.118) and V S S Sastri (p.141), Lefeber (p. 46) says that Rāma violated "the rules of combat as set forth for

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§32 Were Sugrīva and Vālī rivals for the throne of Kiṣkindhā at any time?[97]

No, for: (i) The Rāmāyaṇa says that Sugrīva narrated an exact account of the cause of the enmity between Vālī and himself (4.8.45: vairasya kāraṇam tattvam ākhyātum upacakrame). In his narration, Sugrīva says that before the Māyāvin incident, he had a high regard for Vālī and served him humbly as a servant (4.9.1, 3). There is no reason to doubt Sugrīva. (ii) When Vālī went after Māyāvin and did not return for more than one year, it is not surprising that Vālī's ministers deemed him to be dead and were keen to choose a successor; the ministers chose Sugrīva as the successor. It is not as though he seized the kingship. Thus, it is certain that up to that point, there has been no rivalry for the throne; if there had been, Sugrīva would have managed to become the king much earlier during Vālī's absence. (iii) When Vālī returned to Kiṣkindhā after a year's absence, Sugrīva requested him to resume the kingship and told him that he, Sugrīva, would serve him as before. (iv) During the period when Sugrīva lived in the Ṛśyamūka, he was living in dread of Vālī. After Rāma and Sugrīva met, Sugrīva wanted only that Rāma should

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example in Manu [which] forbids attacking anyone engaged in combat with another. Later in the epic, Hanumān refrains from attack even on Rāvaṇa while the latter is battling the monkey Nīla." But, (1): as noted above, when Rāma shot the arrow, the Vālī–Sugrīva fight was over, and (2): the critics are wrong in their statement about Manu and Hanumān and Nīla and Rāvaṇa, as is shown below.

Manusmṛti is probably not older than Rāmāyaṇa; anyway, it may not apply here; for instance, it forbids fighting at night, but in the Rāmāyaṇa battles took place at night also. More importantly, when Sugrīva and Kumbhakarṇa were engaged in a bitter fight, Hanumān entered the fray, caught the spear hurled by Kumbhakarṇa at Sugrīva and broke it (6.55.45–46). *So, Hanumān did not mind entering the fray between two fighters.*

Kumbhakarṇa struck Sugrīva with a rock, rendered him unconscious and proceeded to carry him away. Hanumān did not try to interfere and rescue Sugrīva because he felt that it might reflect poorly on Sugrīva's reputation and he might feel offended (6.55.61: *mayā tu mokṣitasyāsya sugrīvasya mahātmanaḥ | aprītiś ca bhavet kaṣṭā kīrtināśaś ca śāśvataḥ* ||), for after all, Sugrīva was the king. It must have been for an exactly similar reason that Hanumān did not interfere in the fight between Rāvaṇa and Nīla, for Nīla, was the commander–in–chief (6.21.24: *senāpati; 6.47.67, 72: haricamūpati; 6.47.68: kapicamūpati*) and might feel offended.

97 Masson (1975: p. 672) talks of "sibling rivalry"; R P Goldman (*RV*1, p.10) and more strongly Lefeber (*RV*4: p. 4; p.43) say that Vālī and Sugrīva were rivals for the kingship of Kiṣkindhā; Lefeber: says there was a "dynastic struggle" between Vālī and Sugrīva (*RV*4 p.3) and that they battled for the control of the monkey kingdom (*RV*4: p. 3).

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somehow restrain Vālī (4.10.25 uses the word nigraha); and even after Rāma proved his extraordinary strength, Sugrīva wanted only that Rāma should defeat Vālī (4.12.11 uses the word jahi); he did not want Vālī to be killed, nor did he want the kingdom of Kiṣkindhā. (v) As Vālī lay dying, Hanumān, Sugrīva's chief counsellor, went to Tārā and urged her to get Aṅgada consecrated as king as soon as Vālī dies (4.21.11). We may suppose that Hanumān was only conveying Sugrīva's wishes. But as Vālī was near death, he asked Sugrīva to receive the sovereignty over the vānaras (4.22.5), and addressed him as "O King!" (4.22.7); also, as Vālī lay dying, he gave his divine garland to Sugrīva (4.22.16); as soon as Vālī was dead and was cremated, his ministers surrounded Sugrīva in reverence, treating him as their new sovereign (4.25.1); it is they who made him their king.[98] Sugrīva's acceptance of the kingship was only in accordance with their, and Vālī's, wishes.

We see that there never was any rivalry between Vālī and Sugrīva for the kingship.

§33 Was Sugrīva brave or a coward?

Sugrīva's bravery has been dealt with earlier.

§34 Was Sugrīva sybaritic, that is, a sensualist? Did he neglect his promise to make preparations for the search for Sītā?

Rāma had asked Sugrīva if he knew where Rāvaṇa had taken Sītā to (4.6.20). Sugrīva promised to spare no effort to see that Rāma regained Sītā (4.7.3). Very soon after that, Vālī was killed, Sugrīva became the king of Kiṣkindhā and the rainy season arrived. Rāma told Sugrīva that when the rainy season is over he should exert himself in the matter of punishing Rāvaṇa (4.25.15), as he had promised to do. Then Sugrīva went into Kiṣkindhā, and Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa went into the Prasravaṇa cave to spend the rainy season.

As the days went by, Rāma's grief for Sītā grew uncontrollably, in spite of Lakṣmaṇa's efforts to calm him (*sargas* 26, 27); he was oppressed

98 Pollock (*RV* 2, p. 15) makes the erroneous statement that Sugrīva "forcibly seizes the throne of the monkeys when, with Rāma's aid, he kills his elder brother Vālī". Sugrīva did not kill Vālī and did not forcibly seize the throne of the monkeys.

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by grief and desire (4.29.1: *rāmaḥ kāmaśokābhipīditaḥ*). Soon the rainy season was coming to an end and the skies were clear. Rāma, not having heard anything from Sugrīva and thinking that the *vānara* king had given himself up to sensual pleasures (4.29.3) and had forgotten his promise to endeavour to find Sītā, told Lakṣmaṇa to go and tell Sugrīva that he was angry that Sugrīva had not kept his word and that if he continues to neglect his word than he will be killed (4.29.45–49). Lakṣmaṇa became furious and said, "I shall kill the untruthful Sugrīva today itself!" Rāma tried to pacify him and asked him to use only conciliatory words (4.30.4, 8).

Yet Lakṣmaṇa went to Kiṣkindhā and angrily accused Sugrīva as being unrighteous, ungrateful, addicted to sensual pleasures and as being false to his promise (4.33.7–8;15). Lakṣmaṇa told him that if he did not keep his word he would be killed (4.33.17–18). *Many critics, like K S Rāmaswamy Sastri, Masson, Lefeber and Goldman say, erroneously, on the basis of Lakṣmaṇa's accusation of Sugrīva that the latter was "sybaritic", "lecherous" etc. and neglectful of his promise to start the process of searching for Sītā.* [99] Tārā told Lakṣmaṇa that Sugrīva had indeed initiated action to gather vānaras from various places in order to organize a search for Sītā, and that as many as ten billions of the vānaras were to arrive that very day (4.34.21). Lakṣmaṇa apologized for accusing Sugrīva, and praised Sugrīva's extreme purity, gratefulness and righteousness (4.35.14: śaucam anuttamam; 4.35.16: dharmajña) and begged to be forgiven for the harsh words that he had said because of what grief–stricken Rāma had said earlier (4.35.20).[100]

§35 Sugrīva's character

Danu, a celestial being, describes Sugrīva as one of virtuous conduct, steadfast and mighty, very powerful, clever and who always honours

99 Many critics, say on the basis of Lakṣmaṇa's words in *sarga* 33 that Sugrīva was "sybaritic", "lecherous" etc. and that he had to be threatened by Lakṣmaṇa before starting operations for a search for Sītā (see e.g. Masson p.676b; Lefeber *RV*4 p. 42; Goldman and Goldman 1996: *RV*5, p. 73; Goldman *R R* (2004): p.38).

100 It is amazing that so many scholars (see previous note) have all totally ignored what Lakṣmaṇa says in 4.35.13–18 and 4.35.20 where he asked to be forgiven for his harsh and unjust words.

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claims of gratitude: *nyāyavṛtta, ātmavān vīraḥ, vīryavān, kṛtajñaḥ (3.67.30, 3.68.12, 14);* in saying that Sugrīva sometimes takes up his position on the summit of the Ṛśyamūka mountain that no wrongdoer could ascend and survive (3.69.26, 32), Danu was giving a proof of Sugrīva's sin-free nature. The Rāmāyaṇa describes, on very many occasions, that Sugrīva was a virtuous and great and courageous warrior, comparable to Indra, and an expert in the use of various weapons.[101] His fame as a warrior was well known even before the Laṅkā war; Rāvaṇa says Vālī and Sugrīva are extremely valorous monkeys (5.44.10). In the Laṅkā war, Sugrīva fought and killed several great rākṣasa warriors including Kumbha, Virūpākṣa and Mahāpārśva. *One wonders why some critics say that Sugrīva was a coward, and/or speak ill of his account of Vālī's hostility towards him, even though the Rāmāyaṇa introduces his narration as an exact, truthful account of what had happened.*[102]

§36 **Vālī's character**

The Rāmāyaṇa does not say much about Vālī's character directly, except for the references to his anger again and again on numerous occasions.[103] Vālī's total lack of nobility and chivalry is revealed by the fact that he angrily pursued Māyāvin, who was fleeing in terror of him, and Vālī then killed him; Vālī angrily pursued his wounded and bleeding brother Sugrīva as he fled towards the Ṛśyamūka. (This is in strong contrast to

101 For instance: *dharmātmā* (4.2.4), *mahātmā* (4.3.1, 4.15.1, 4.35.12), *tajasvī (4.8.30), mahāvīrya (4.16.14), raṇapaṇḍita (4.16.17); śrīmān (6.2.1), laghuvikramaḥ (6.11.16), bhīmavikramaḥ (6.20.2), mahātejāḥ (6.40.2; 6.57.75), mahābalaḥ (6.40.1; 6.63.31, 49), sattvasampannaḥ (6.40.20), vīryavān (6.63.50), indropama (6.55.53), vīryavān . . . śrīmān mahāsattvaḥ (6.63.34), mahābalaḥ (6.63.49), bhīmaparākramaḥ (6.63.53), tejasvī (6.85.17), śastraviśārada (6.85.24).*
It is amazing that some critics say that Sugrīva was a coward (see note 84 above).

102 It was also pointed out earlier that the Rāmāyaṇa calls Sugrīva's narration truthful and exact. It is amazing that some critics call it a stinking, self-serving account, highly coloured tale, etc. See for instance Masson (1975; p. 674a), R P Goldman (1993: p. 142 in Barbara Stoler Miller (ed.): Masterworks of Asian literature in comparative perspective).

103 The Rāmāyaṇa itself refers, numerous times, to Vālī's great anger: see e.g. 4.12.16, 22; 4.15.2, 3, 4; 4.16.12, 13, 14, 17. Kabandha (Danu) refers to it in 3.68.11, 16; Sugrīva refers to Vālī's anger a number of times; see 4.9.7, 12, 22; 4.10.1; 4.11.35, 37; Tārā also refers to it in 4.15.7 as gushing like a mighty river in flood. Tārā said also that Vālī's death was the result of his action of appropriating Sugrīva's wife and driving him out of the country (see 4.20.11 quoted earlier).

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how Sugrīva treated Kumbha and how Rāma treated Rāvaṇa when their rākṣasa enemy had been rendered weapon–less.)

Sugrīva, whom the Rāmāyaṇa calls most virtuous, says that "it is well–known that because of a woman there was great hostility" between Vālī and Māyāvin (4.9.4). If it was "well–known", it means that Vālī had probably abducted Māyāvin's wife or sister. It is noteworthy that Vālī himself acknowledges that he was "known to be a flagrant violator of righteousness" (4.18.44: *mām–apy–avagatam dharmāt–vyatikrānta–puraskṛtam*); we should note also that he had appropriated the wife of his living younger brother and had ceaselessly sought to kill him, and that Vālī, as he lay dying, confessed to Sugrīva that he had acted wrongly (4.22.3).[104]

104 Vālī's pursuit of Māyāvin and Sugrīva shows that he did not care for the principle that one should not attack one who has abandoned the fight and is fleeing for his life. The principle was observed by practically everybody else in the Rāmāyaṇa: by Rāma, Sugrīva, Daśaratha's soldiers, and even by rākṣasas like Atikāya and Rāvaṇa. But it was repeatedly violated by Vālī.
Some critics like Masson and Shulman praise Vālī as noble, magnanimous etc. and condemn Sugrīva as one who tells a "stinking story", who is a coward, and who "appropriated" his brother's wife; citing the CE in their bibliography, they rely extensively on spurious verses. And academic scholars seem to have accepted much of their gibberish without proper scrutiny. No wonder that Lefeber's comments in *RV*4 are a bundle of errors.

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4
Sītā's Agni-praveśa

§1 *The Rāmāyaṇa reaches a climax in the momentous agni-praveśa episode in sargas 103–106 of the Yuddhakāṇḍa.* For convenience, we shall call them a–p chapter 1, a–p chapter 2, a–p chapter 3 and a–p chapter 4, respectively.

A–p chapter 1 *says that after the end of the Laṅkā war and Sītā was rescued from her captivity, Rāma spoke to her very harshly and rejected her saying as follows:*

"I have avenged the insult to my honour . . . for a man of honour must do so. It was to avenge the insult to my honour that Rāvaṇa was killed and you were rescued" (6.103.3, 6, 13) (gato 'smi antam amarṣasya dharṣaṇā sampramārjitā | avamānaś ca śatruś ca mayā yugapaduddhrtau || samprāptam avamānam yas tejasā na pramārjati | kas tasya puruṣārtho 'sti puruṣasyālpatejasaḥ || yat kartavyam manuṣyeṇa dharṣaṇām parimārjatā | tat kṛtam sakalam sīte śatruhastād amarṣaṇāt ||)

"The war was not for your sake but to establish my honour and the honour of my glorious family" (6.103.15–16: viditaś cāstu te bhadre yo 'yam raṇapariśramaḥ | sa tīrṇaḥ suhṛdām vīryāt na tvadartham mayā kṛtaḥ || rakṣatā tu mayā vṛttam apavādam ca sarvaśaḥ | prakhyātasya ātmavamśasya nyaṅgam ca parimārjatā ||)

"Your chastity has come under suspicion; it hurts my eyes to see you, like a bright lamp would hurt someone whose eyes are diseased" (6.103.17: prāptacāritrasandehā mama pratimukhe sthitā | dīpto netrāturasyeva pratikūlā 'si me dṛḍam ||)

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"Which man born in a noble family will take back a woman who had lived in another man's house? . . . I cannot take you back" (6.103.19, 20: kaḥ pumān hi kule jātaḥ striyam paragṛhoṣitām | tejasvī punar ādadyāt suhṛllekhyena cetasā ||)

"I have no more any affection for you; you may go wherever you wish"[105] *(6.103.21: nāsti me tvayyabhiṣvaṅgo yathṣṭam gamyatām itaḥ ||)*

Sarga 104 gives Sītā's response to Rāma's words. She chides him for speaking like an uncultured man to an uncultured woman and for suspecting the character of all women for the actions of a few; she reminds him that she is of an equally noble family as he and reminds him of his vows at the time of their marriage (6.104.5, 7, 15–16). Sītā then asks Lakṣmaṇa to light a fire and enters it, calling upon Agni, the god of fire, to vouch for her purity by protecting her (6.104.18, 24–25). *Sarga* 105 says that the gods remonstrated with Rāma for rejecting Sītā and reminded him that Sītā and he are none other than Lakṣmī and Lord Viṣṇu (6.105.5, 25). *Sarga* 106 describes Agni deva coming out of the fire with Sītā and praising her purity. Rāma accepts Sītā, saying that he had never had doubts of Sītā's purity and that his previous words of rejection and the a–p which ensued were only in order to convince the men of the world at large of Sītā's purity who might otherwise say that Rāma accepted Sītā out of pure lust (6.106.13–15).

The need for context sensitivity

Rāma's words in Sarga 103 (cited above) have been the basis of criticism by several scholars (and non–scholars) that Rāma was heartless, selfish and cruel towards his wife, that he cared more for his honour and that of his family than for Sītā, that he cared more for what his subjects would say of him than he did for Sītā, etc. A superficial reading of the sarga will indeed lead to such conclusions. The sarga shows that a more careful and context–sensitive approach — sensitive to the words and actions of the various characters in the Rāmāyaṇa and sensitive also to Vālmīki's own words that are inserted by Vālmīki at various points in the text of the poem – is necessary, one that takes into account the entire

105 Since Sītā cannot live alone by herself, she will have to seek someone to support her.

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Rāmāyaṇa, and that such an approach yields an interpretation of the Agnipraveśa episode that is consistent with the entire Rāmāyaṇa and shows that Rāma was not heartless and cruel etc. but rather that Rāma and Sītā were an ideal couple deeply committed to each other.

§2.1 **First let us take a closer look at a–p chapter 1**

There is more than one way of looking at it. A superficial critic will consider only that chapter (and perhaps the two *sargas* that follow it) and ignore the nearly 500 *sargas* that precede it.[106] We should take into consideration Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa[107] as a whole and see whether the a–p chapters are in consonance with the nearly *500* preceding sargas. If they are not, then the accusations that Rāma was heartless and cruel etc. will crumble.

§2.2 **The a–p chapter 1 is part of a larger whole, the Rāmāyaṇa**

In that chapter, Rāma appears to speak, and act, very harshly. *We have to inquire first whether such speech and action are consistent with his character, behaviour, feelings and statements as may be seen in the preceding nearly 500 sargas of the Rāmāyaṇa.*

§3 **There are three questions to consider**

Question 1: What kind of a person is Rāma shown to be in the first 500 or so sargas? And in the sargas up to the a–p chapter 1, how has he reacted to being separated from Sītā? *Question 2:* Where else *other than in the a–p chapter 1* does he talk about honour and reputation as the reasons for the war? The study of the two points will lead one to see that Rāma's behaviour in the a–p chapter is totally inconsistent with what has gone before, and so the *Question 3* will be, "How can we deal with, or explain, the inconsistency?" Let us now consider these questions at some length.

§4.1 **On Question 1**

In the a–p chapter 1, Rāma speaks, and acts, very harshly. Are such speech and action in keeping with his character as may be seen in the

106 That is what for instance the American professor Wendy O'Flaherty [Doniger] has done in her (unfortunately) widely known book "Hindu Myths".

107 Many critics unfortunately do not take the whole Rāmāyaṇa into consideration.

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preceding nearly 500 *sargas*? In particular, Rāma says in this sarga that he had no attachment to Sītā and that the purpose of his war against Rāvaṇa was not to regain her but to regain his own fame, and his own and his exalted family's honour. Are such statements by Rāma consistent with his statements and behaviour as seen in the preceding 500 *sargas*?

§4.2 *Rāma's affection for Sītā*

Quite early, we are introduced to Rāma, his qualities and his closeness to Sītā: he was even-tempered and kind-spoken and would not retort angrily even when spoken to harshly; he had great self-control, always spoke softly, and he understood the true nature of righteousness;[108] he had conquered anger and jealousy.[109] The mutual love between Rāma and Sītā[110] was so great that each could read the other's innermost heart.[111] He loved her so much that he could never leave her behind or abandon her.[112] Rāma is full of praise not only for Sītā's family, but for Sītā herself, and says that she is dearer to him than life itself.[113] This last statement by Rāma is the literal truth, for Vālmīki also declares that Sītā was dearer to Rāma than life itself.[114]

Rāma's harsh words to Sītā in the a-p chapter 1 are therefore very surprising to say the least. Was it really Rāma who was saying such things and acting so harshly?

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108 Vālmīki himself describes Rāma as follows. 2.1.12: *dharmātmā;* 2.1.15: *sa hi nityaṃ praśantātmā mṛdupūrvaṃ ca bhāṣate | ucyamāno 'pi paruṣaṃ nottaraṃ pratipadyate* || Rāma's self-control is indicated by the word ātmavattayā in 2.1.16, 2.1.18: *satyavāg ṛjuḥ;* 2.1.19 refers to Rāma as *dharmārthakāma-tattvajñaḥ;* 2.1.20: śāstrajñaś ca kṛtajñaś *ca puruṣāntarakovidaḥ*

109 2.1.25 describes Rāma: *anasūyo jitakrodhaḥ.*

110 Sītā had entered fully into her husband Rāma's noble heart (5.4.21: *bhartur manaḥ śrīmad anupraviṣṭām . . .*).

111 1.76.15-16: *guṇād rūpaguṇāccāpi prītirbhūyo 'bhivartata | tasyāś ca bhartā dviguṇaṃ hṛdaye parivartate || antarjātamapi vyakttam ākhyāti hṛdayaṃ hṛdā |*

112 2.27.27: *yat sṛṣṭāsi mayā sārdhaṃ vanavāsāya maithili | na vihātuṃ mayā śakyā kīrtirātmavatā yathā* ||

113 3.9.20: Rāma tells Sītā: *sadṛśaṃ cānurūpaṃ ca kulasya tava śobhane | 3.140*: sadharnacāriṇī me tvaṃ prāṇebhyo 'pi garīyasī* || In 3.56.6 [Rāma says] *vaidehī prāṇaiḥ priyatarā mama* | In 3.59.24 he refers to Sītā as *"prāṇebhyo 'pi garīyasī";* in 3.63.26 as '*maithilī prāṇasamā mama".*

114 Verse 4.26.6 says that Sītā was *"prāṇebhyo 'pi garīyasī"* for Rāma.

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§4.3 *Next let us see what effect Sītā's abduction had on Rāma*

Did he feel it as a personal sorrow, or as an affront to his or to his family's honour?

Again and again, Rāma expresses his deep sorrow and anguish that Sītā had been abducted. *In the Araṇyakāṇḍa,* the four sargas 3.59–62 are almost entirely on Rāma's distressed lament at his separation from Sītā. His agony was so great that it drove him to near madness *and he went about in the forest asking the trees and flowers for news of Sītā. Getting no answer, he sinks into despair and* says that he cannot live without Sītā even for a little while; he says that Sītā is dear as his own life; and he bewails, "I cannot live without Sītā. How indeed can I bear life without Sītā?" [115] He was so tortured in his mind at the loss of Sītā that he, who had earlier been described as one who had conquered anger, was now overcome by anger and he says, "On account of Sītā, I shall rid the world of rākṣasas";[116] in his mad fury he is ready to destroy everything around him; he says, "If the gods do not restore Sītā to me this very day, I shall destroy all the worlds including the Devas, Gandharvas, humans and others"[117] (and Lakṣmaṇa had to calm him down, saying that he should not punish the whole world for the action of one person and that he should not succumb to sorrow like an 'ordinary' person).[118] Rāma falls to the ground in agony, crying out "Where is Sītā, dear as my own life?"[119] Eight *sargas* later, we find that Rāma is still bewailing, "How can I possibly live without Sītā?"[120]

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115 Rāma says to Lakṣmaṇa: 3.56.4: *yāṃ vinā notsahe vīra muhūrtamapi jīvitum | kva sā prāṇasahāyā me sītā surasutopamā* || 3.63.26: Rāma bewails: *kva maithilī prāṇasamā mameti vimucya vācaṃ nipapāta bhūmau* ||

116 3.60.47: Rāma says: ākarṇapūrnair iṣubhir jīvalokaṃ durāvaraiḥ | *kariṣye maithilīhetoḥ apiśācam arākṣasam* || 3.60.49: *naiva devā na daiteyā na piśācā na rākṣasāḥ | bhaviṣyanti mama krodhāt trailokye vipraṇāśite* ||

117 3.60.52: Rāma says: *pureva me cārudatīm aninditāṃ diśanti sītām yadi nādya maithilīm | sa-deva-gandharva-manuṣya-pannagaṃ jagat saśailaṃ parivartayāmy aham* ||

118 Lakṣmaṇa to Rāma: 3.61.9 : *na ekasya tu kṛte lokān vināśayitum arhasi* ||
3.62.13 : śocituṃ nārhase vīra yathānyaḥ prākṛtas tathā ||

119 3.63.26: *kva maithilī prāṇasamā mameti vimucya vācaṃ nipapāta bhūmau* ||

120 See 3.56.4 quoted in Note 115 above. [3.75.28] = CE 3.1375* line 1: Rāma laments: *kathaṃ mayā vinā sītāṃ śakyaṃ lakṣmaṇa jīvitum* ||

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But nowhere in the Araṇyakāṇḍa does Rāma describe Sītā's abduction as an affront to his or his family's honour.

§4.4 In the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* also Rāma behaves in the same way (and, as we shall see, in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* and *Yuddhakāṇḍa* too). Tears flow from his eyes "like an unbroken stream", lamenting at the loss of Sītā who was "dear as life to him".[121] Sugrīva had to tell him that such yielding to sorrow and despair was not worthy of a man like Rāma.[122] It should be noted that the Rāmāyaṇa too says that Rāma's wife, Sītā, was dearer to him than his own life.[123] Rāma repeatedly laments and worries about Sītā (4.29.4–10).

But he expresses no feeling that his or his family's honour was at stake.

§4.5 In the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, Hanumān describes Rāma as sunk in sorrow due to the absence of Sītā.[124] When Hanumān gave Rāma Sītā's *cūḍāmaṇi* (hair–ornament), Rāma clasped it to his heart and burst into weeping;[125] when Hanumān conveyed to Rāma the message that Sītā had sent through him, Rāma again and again asked Hanumān to repeat Sītā's words, as he was eager to hear her words again and again, for, as he said, he felt her words falling on his ears just as a person who had fainted would feel water being sprinkled over him;[126] he said that only Sītā's words could keep him alive, like medicine keeps alive a sick

121 4.6.17 describes Rāma as *avicchinnāśruvegaḥ*; 4.6.20: Rāma refers to Sītā: *mama prāṇasamā priyā* || [4.1.106] = CE 4.App. I. No. 2, lines 2–3: śyāmā padmapalāśākṣī *priyā virahitā mayā* | *kathaṃ dhārayati prāṇān vivaśā janakātmajā* || [4.1.109] = CE 4.App. I. No. 2, line 8: *tayā vihīnaḥ kṛpaṇaḥ kathaṃ lakṣmaṇa dhāraye* ||

122 4.7.5= ff.; e.g. 4.7.5=: *alaṃ vaiklavyaṃ . . .* | *tvadvidhānāṃ na sadṛśam īdṛśaṃ buddhilāghavam* ||

123 Vālmīki's words: 4.26.6: *hṛtāṃ hi bhāryāṃ smarataḥ prāṇebhyo 'pi garīyasīm* |

124 E.g., 5.34.35: Hanumān to Sītā, describing Rāma: *tava adarśanajena ārye śokena pariplutaḥ* | Similarly in 5.34.39–43.

125 5.64.1: *evam ukto hanumatā rāmo daśarathātmajaḥ* | *taṃ maṇiṃ hṛdaye kṛtvā prarurodha salakṣmaṇaḥ* ||

126 5.64.8: *kimāha sītā vaidehī brūhi saumya punaḥ punaḥ* | *parāsumiva toyena siñcantī vākyavāriṇā* ||

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person;[127] and Rāma said that he cannot live even a single moment without Sītā.[128]

But nowhere does he express the feeling that his or his family's honour was at stake!

It is noteworthy too, that when Hanumān returned to Rāma after seeing Sītā in Laṅkā, Rāma did not ask him about Laṅkā or Rāvaṇa or his army, but repeatedly asks how Sītā was and was eager to hear again and again what she had said to Hanumān.[129] It is only in the *third sarga* of the *next* kāṇḍa, and that too after Sugrīva chided him (in *sarga 2*) for wallowing in sorrow like an 'ordinary' [i.e. uncultured] man instead of busying himself with plans for the invasion of Laṅkā (6.2.2, 19), that Rāma started to ask Hanumān about Laṅkā's army and its defences and fortifications (6.3.3–5).

§4.6 In the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* too, Rāma is described as still being desolate due to the separation from Sītā. On the eve of the crossing of the ocean he says, "Sorrow is said to decrease with time, but, for me who am separated from Sītā, it increases with every day";[130] "Separation from Sītā is the fuel, and worry about her the flames for my love of her which burns my body day and night";[131] "I am able to bear living only because of the thought that she and I are in the same world".[132] (The entire *sarga* is on Rāma's pain and distress at being separated from Sītā.)

127 5.64.14: *kimāha sītā hanuman tattvataḥ kathayasva me | etena khalu jīviṣye bheṣajenāturo yathā* ||

128 5.64.10: *kṣaṇam saumya na jīveyaṃ vinā tām asitekṣaṇām* ||

129 See notes 127, 128 above.

130 6.5.4: śokaś ca kila kālena gacchatā hyapagacchati |
mama cāpaśyataḥ kāntām ahanyahani vardhate ||

131 6.5.8: *tadviyoga–indhanavatā taccintāvipulārciṣā | rātriṃ divaṃ śarīraṃ me dahyate madanāgninā* ||

132 6.5.10: *bahvetat kāmayānasya śakyametena jīvitum | yadahaṃ sā ca vāmorūr ekāṃ dharaṇim āśritau* ||
Even in regard to the Yuddhakāṇḍa, [6.42.8] = 6. 676* lines 5–6 say that as soon as the war began, Rāma's first thoughts were of Sītā and her sufferings in captivity (and not his or his family's honour etc.)

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We see that there is enormous evidence that Rāma was plunged into deep sorrow and anguish, and was driven to near madness that Sītā had been abducted.

We note also that in the more than 100 sargas of the Yuddhakāṇḍa and nearly 500 sargas preceding the first chapter of the a–p episode, Rāma makes no reference to any need to vindicate his or his family's honour, but does so for the first time in a–p chapter 1!

§4.7 In spite of his love for Sītā, in a–p chapter 1, when after the Laṅkā war was over and Vibhīṣaṇa brought Sītā to his presence, Rāma does not greet her with even one loving word or gesture, but speaks to her in very harsh words. He acts very strangely indeed. He does not utter a single word of compassion or consolation to his wife Sītā who had been held captive by Rāvaṇa for nearly a year. He does not greet and accept her as his long–lost beloved wife, but rejects her using harsh words. Why did he act like that? Why did he act in a manner that is totally inconsistent with and is contrary to his character as depicted in the previous nearly *500 sargas* of the Rāmāyaṇa?

§4.8 Rāma had said, *repeatedly*, that he could not live even one moment without Sītā and felt that his body was burning, night and day, due to separation from her. He also referred to Sītā as *satī* (*pativratā*, or chaste wife), *sādhvī* (of excellent character) and as being *amarasutopamā* (goddess–like).[133] Is it the same Rāma who now, in a–p chapter 1, rejects Sītā as tainted by the suspicion of un–chastity and bad character?

§4.9 When Sītā is brought to his presence, Rāma utters words rejecting her, saying that he can't even bear to look at her; he tells her: "You are as unwelcome for me as a lamp to a person with diseased eyes, because of the doubt about your chastity."[134] Why is Rāma acting like this? Is it the same Rāma in whom, upon hearing from Hanumān that Sītā was alive, happiness and the desire to live were re– born, as when a sick person on

133 6.5.15: (*satī*); 6.5.19: When will Sītā embrace me, shedding tears of joy? *kadā nu khalu māṃ sādhvī sītā amarasutopamā | sotkaṇṭhā kaṇṭhaṃ ālambya mokṣyati ānandajaṃ jalam ||*

134 6.103.17: *prāptacāritrasandehā mama pratimukhe sthitā | dīpo netrāturasya iva pratikūlāsi me dṛḍham ||*

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the brink of death feels after drinking amṛta (life-giving nectar)?[135] Is it the same Rāma who even on the eve of the war had wailed, "When will I get to see Sītā, who is like Śrī [herself]? When am I going to gaze on her beautiful face, like a sick person gazes on a life-giving medicine? . . . When will I get to embrace her? . . . When am I going to get her back?"[136]

§4.10 In a–p chapter 1, Rāma tells Sītā, "I feel no attachment towards you".[137] Is it the same Rāma who had bewailed Sītā's absence, as we saw earlier? Why then in a–p chapter 1 does he speak and act as he did?

§4.11 Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (as well as the monkeys and bears in his army) knew (from Hanumān's eyewitness report) that even in spite of all enticements and threats Sītā had remained a *pativratā* after being abducted. *Hanumān had seen her in her captivity, when she was tormented by the Rākṣasis guarding her and alternately cajoled and threatened by Rāvaṇa.*[138] Vibhīṣaṇa also had told Rāma that Sītā was most pure and chaste and that there was no way Rāvaṇa could corrupt her.[139] It is not surprising that Rāma had called her *asādhvī, satī* etc. Yet, in a–p chapter 1, he rejects her with harsh words. Why does he act in that manner?

§4.12 Note that Rāma was no 'ordinary', uncultured man; the Rāmāyaṇa had described him quite early as just, righteous (*dharmajña)*, learned, wise, compassionate and free from anger.[140]

Rāma's words rejecting Sītā are based on the sole ground that she had been in Laṅkā in Rāvaṇa's custody for nearly a year. For he said,

135 Hanumān describes to Bharata, just prior to Rāma's return to Ayodhyā, the effect on Rāma when he conveyed to him that he had seen and talked with Sītā in Laṅkā: 6.114.39: śrutvā tāṃ maithilīṃ hṛṣṭas tu āśaśaṃse sa jīvitam | *jīvitāntam anuprāptaḥ pītvā amṛtam ivāturaḥ* ||

136 6.5.12: *kadā nu khalu suśroṇīṃ śatapatrāyatekṣaṇām | vijitya śatrūn drakṣyāmi sītāṃ sphītām iva śriyam* || 6.5.13: *kadā nu cārubimboṣṭam tasyāḥ padmamivānanam* | īṣadunnāmya pāsyāmi rasāyanamiva āturaḥ || 6.5.19: *kadā nu khalu māṃ sādhvī sītā amarasutopamā | sotkaṇṭhā kaṇṭhaṃ ālambya mokṣyati ānandajaṃ jalam* ||

137 6.103.21: *nāsti me tvayi abhiṣvaṅgo yatheṣṭaṃ gamyatām itaḥ* ||

138 See 5.18.15–23; 5.20.8–9; 5.21.4–19; 5.56.59–65.

139 Vibhīṣaṇa tells Rāma: 6.71.12: *naiva sāmnā na bhedena na dānena kuto yudhā | sā draṣṭum api śakyeta naiva cānyena kenacit* ||

140 See for instance verses 1.1.2–4, 8, 12.

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"Which man born in a noble family will take back a woman who had lived in another man's house? . . . I cannot take you back." Sītā correctly retorts: "Why do you talk to me like an 'ordinary' man to an 'ordinary' woman and say abominable things? . . . Because of the behaviour of a few low, vulgar women, you are suspicious of all women!"[141] (The word "ordinary" refers to one who is common, vulgar and uncultured.)

§4.13 We seek to find an answer to the question: *Why did Rāma speak and act toward Sītā like an 'ordinary' man to an 'ordinary' woman?* His words are not consistent with what we know of him from the preceding *500 sargas* of the Rāmāyaṇa.

§5.0 **Question 2: *Where else (other than in a–p chapter 1) does Rāma speak of honour and reputation?***

In the a–p chapter, Rāma *repeatedly* refers to his honour and that of his "illustrious" family, and that it was to vindicate that honour and not for the recovery of Sītā that he waged the war against Rāvaṇa;[142] he rejects her, saying that he has no affection for her.[143] Why did Rāma act like that, when in so many *sargas* from *Araṇyakāṇḍa* through *Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa* and *Sundarakāṇḍa* to *Yuddhakāṇḍa* itself, till a–p chapter 1, he was expressing his anguished sorrow at Sītā's absence *and never once mentioned that his or his family's honour had been compromised by her abduction*? Just prior to crossing the ocean and invading Laṅkā, Rāma had declared, "I shall kill Rāvaṇa and bring Sītā back" (6.4.5). Even as late as the middle of the war, when Indrajit had been killed, Rāma says: "Now it will not be difficult *to recover Sītā*" (referring to the purpose of

141 6.104.5: *rūkṣaṃ śrāvayase vīra prākṛtaḥ prākṛtām iva* ||
6.104.7: *pṛthakstrīṇāṃ pracāreṇa jātiṃ tvaṃ pariśaṅkase* |

142 6.103.3: Rāma tells Sītā: *avamānaśca śatruś ca mayā yugapad uddhṛtau* ||
6.103.6: Rāma tells Sītā: *samprāptam avamānaṃ yas tejasā na pramārjati* | *kastasya puruṣārtho 'sti puruṣasya alpatejasaḥ* || 6.103.13: *yat kartavyaṃ manuṣyeṇa dharṣaṇāṃ pariimārjatā* | *tat kṛtam sakalaṃ sīte śatruhastād amarṣaṇāt* || 6.103.15: *viditaścāstu bhadraṃ te yo 'yaṃ raṇapariśramaḥ* | *sa tīrṇaḥ suhṛdāṃ vīryāt na tvadarthaṃ mayā kṛtaḥ* || 6.103.16: *rakṣatā tu mayā vṛttam apavādaṃ ca sarvaśaḥ* | *prakhyātasya ātmavaṃśasya nyaṅgaṃ ca parimārjatā* || 6.103.20: *kathaṃ tvāṃ punar ādadyāṃ kulaṃ vyapadiśan mahat* ||

143 6.103.21: Rāma's words to Sītā: *nāsti me tvayi abhiṣvaṅgo yatheṣṭam gamyatām itaḥ* ||

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the war), but he does not refer to recovering his or his family's honour.[144] Later still, Rāma refers to his pain and sorrow at the abduction of Sītā and wandering in the forest (looking for her),[145] but does not refer to any need to vindicate his own or his family's honour.

The above analysis shows again that in the a–p chapter 1 *Rāma acted very strangely and in a manner totally inconsistent with his character as developed in the previous 500 sargas of the Rāmāyaṇa. We are thus brought to our third and crucial question.*

§6.0 **Question 3: In the a–p chapters, why did Rāma and Sītā act the way they did?**

Rāma was a *dharmajña,* well versed in all the śāstras, was always sweet-spoken and never got angry, not even when spoken to harshly. He had sorely missed Sītā, whom he loved dearly and whom he knew to be blemishless. Why then did he act in a–p chapter1 like an 'ordinary man' (vulgar, unlearned and uncultured) towards an 'ordinary' woman and spoke most harshly to Sītā?

§6.1 *Did* Rāma really mean what he said to Sītā, or was it perhaps just an act? From what we know of his qualities, character and love for Sītā, we cannot believe that he meant the harsh words that he said to Sītā — words that led her to do the agni-praveśa and prove her chastity. A possible solution to Question 3 would then be that *the whole a–p episode is only an act and has a purpose behind it.*

§6.2 *If the a–p episode is an act, what was its purpose, and what did the act achieve?*

If the a–p was intended to prove to Rāma or to the Rākṣasas and the monkeys and bears assembled in Laṅkā that Sītā was chaste, the agni-praveśa was totally unnecessary. Hanumān's testimony was already known to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the monkeys and bears in Rāma's army;

144 6.79.09: Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa: *tvayā lakṣmaṇa nāthena sītā ca pṛthivī ca me | na duṣprāpā hate tvadya śakrajetari ca āhave ||*

145 6.88.46–47: *rājyanāśaṃ vane vāsaṃ daṇḍake paridhāvanam | vaidehyāś ca parāmarśaṃ rakṣobhiś ca samāgamam || prāptaṃ duḥkhaṃ mahadghoraṃ . . . |*

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(see for instance verses 5.56.58–63; 5.63.10–13). There were other witnesses too who could attest to her purity: Vibhīṣaṇa, Saramā, Kalā (Vibhīṣaṇa's daughter), Manḍodarī, Trijaṭā and also any number of other Rākṣasis (like Ajāmukhī, Caṇḍodarī, Ekajaṭā, Praghasā, Śūrpaṇakhā, Vikaṭā and Vinatā) who had been guarding Sītā in the Aśoka Grove; even Sītā's appearance as she was — if she had been brought to Rāma's presence straight from the aśoka–vana where she had been held captive — in her pitiable appearance, unbathed, unkempt, wearing a dusty soiled raiment and no ornaments,[146] would have been evidence that she had not been living in luxury in Rāvaṇa's palace.

One way of looking at the issue is the following. Rāma must have wanted the "world at large", including the 'ordinary' uncultured men of Ayodhyā to be convinced of Sītā's purity — indeed he says as much. When Agni deva brings Sītā to Rāma after her a–p, *Rāma accepts her, saying that he had never had doubts of Sītā's purity and that his previous words of rejection and the a–p which ensued were only in order to convince the men of the world at large of Sītā's purity who might otherwise say that Rāma accepted Sītā out of pure lust* (6.106.13–15).

Sītā's agni–praveśa, witnessed by Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa, Sugrīva, Hanumān, Aṅgada, Jāmbhavān and large numbers of monkeys and bears, would achieve that purpose when, as we may suppose, these witnesses tell the people of Ayodhyā of the happenings in Laṅkā. We must note here that on the eve of returning to Ayodhyā, Rāma specifically asked Hanumān to relate to Bharata the happenings in Laṅkā, including his meeting with Daśaratha which is described in the sarga following the a–p chapter 4; thus, we may suppose that Hanumān told Bharata of the happenings in the a–p chapters 1–4 also.

§6.3 Let us again look at the a–p chapters 1–4. Rāma's words reject Sītā on grounds that only an 'ordinary' (i.e. uncultured) man would use, namely that the chastity of an abducted woman is subject to suspicion and that therefore she cannot be taken back; Sītā forcefully rejects such reasoning and does agni–praveśa, calling upon Agni deva to bear

146 See Hanumān's description of Sītā in the Aśoka woods: 5.13.18–25.

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testimony to her purity; the devas remonstrate with Rāma for rejecting Sītā and behaving like an 'ordinary' man (6.105.8); Brahmā reveals that Sītā is Lakṣmī and that Rāma is Viṣṇu; Agni deva emerges out of the fire with the resplendent Sītā, and praises her as chaste and blemishless. Rāma accepts Sītā, saying that he knew Sītā to be pure and totally devoted to him, that his words rejecting her were only for the sake of convincing the people of the world, and that Sītā is the purest woman in all three worlds.[147]

§6.4 The agni-praveśa episode serves another purpose too. The 'ordinary' (uncultured) men of the world in all probability would have agreed with Rāma's words in a-p 1 rejecting Sītā; or, put another way, Rāma's words in a-p 1 reflect the attitude of the 'ordinary' men. But the ending of the episode taught the world that his words were neither justified nor were really in accordance with Rāma's own feelings. Thus Rāma's act of behaving harshly towards Sītā conveyed a moral lesson to the world, for it resulted in the upholding of Sītā's argument that one should not condemn all women for the actions of a few; or, seen in a wider context, that one should not condemn a whole group for the actions of a few, as Lakṣmaṇa also had pointed out even earlier to a distraught Rāma[148] who, unable to bear the absence of Sītā, threatened to destroy the Devas, Gandharvas, and indeed the whole world if Sītā was not restored to him immediately. It teaches also in particular that *an abducted woman should not be condemned but should be rescued and welcomed back into family and society.*

§7.0 The a-p episode must have been intended to teach a moral lesson, for that alone makes sense. We must note that Vālmīki, through the Rāmāyaṇa, teaches people how to lead a good and noble life. The Rāmāyaṇa is densely sprinkled with numerous incidents and statements, far too many to be enumerated here, that do precisely that. To cite just

147 6.106.13: *ananyahṛdayāṃ bhaktāṃ maccittaparirakṣinīm* |
ahamapy avagacchāmi maithilīṃ janakātmajām ||
6.106.14: *pratyayārthaṃ tu lokānāṃ trayāṇāṃ satyasaṃśrayaḥ* |
upekṣe cāpi vaidehīṃ praviśantīṃ hutāśanam ||
6.106.18: *viśuddhā triṣu lokeṣu maithilī janakātmajā* |
na hi hātuṃ iyaṃ śakyā kīrtir ātmavatā yathā ||

148 See 3.60.49–50; 3.61.9: *naikasya tu kṛte lokān vināśayitum arhasi* |

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a few: At the very beginning, Rāma is called a perfect man and Sītā as the ideal woman.[149] Rāma accepts his father's decision to send him to exile with equanimity, even pleasure, in order to uphold his father's promise to Kaikeyī; he tells Kaikeyī that he would not care to live merely for the sake of wealth for he holds to *dharma* (right conduct).[150] The description of Guha of the lowly hunter tribe as a friend of Rāma, "dear to him as his own life" and as embracing Rāma with affection [151] shows that one should not make distinctions based on birth, *varṇa* or *jāti.* The Rāmāyaṇa says that Daśaratha killed, though only unwittingly, a young Śūdra ascetic and then realized that by that act he had committed a great sin.[152] The Śūdra ascetic's father, a Vaiśya ascetic, cursed Daśaratha to end his days grieving for his son;[153] and that is exactly how Daśaratha died.[154] The conversation between the *tapasvinī* Anasūyā and Sītā is utilized to describe how an ideal wife should behave.[155] Śabarī, a woman of the lowly hunter class, is described as a perfect ascetic (3.70.6, 9: *siddhā, tāpasī*). The Rāmāyaṇa thus conveys that śūdras and women may also engage themselves in austerities. Sītā says that false speech, adultery and cruelty without cause lead to sorrow.[156] When she was being carried away by Rāvaṇa, she berates him, saying that abducting a woman is a highly reproachable, despicable act.[157] Mārīca tells Rāvaṇa that he should be satisfied with his own wives and not covet

149 1.1.2–19.

150 2.16.46 [Rāma tells Kaikeyī]: *nāhaṃ arthaparo devi lokam āvastum utsahe | viddhi māṃ ṛṣibhis tulyaṃ vimalaṃ dharmam āsthitam* ||

151 2.44.9: *tatra rājā guho nāma rāmasya ātmasamaḥ sakhā | niṣādajātyo balavān . . .*
6.113.5: Rāma says: *bhaviṣyati guhaḥ prītaḥ sa mama ātmasamaḥ sakhā* ||
2.44.12: (Guha embraced Rāma): *tam ārtaḥ samparisvajya guho rāmaṃ abravīt* |
2.44.17: (Rāma embraced Guha): *bhujābhyāṃ sādhuvṛttābhyām pīḍayan vākyam idam abravīt* ||

152 2.58.1: *tad ajñānān mahatpāpaṃ kṛtvā saṃkulitendriyaḥ* |

153 2.58.46: *putravyasanajaṃ duḥkhaṃ yadetan mama sāmpratam | evaṃ tvaṃ putrśokena rājan kālaṃ kariṣyasi* ||

154 See 2.58.57: *tathā tu dīnaṃ kathayan narādhipaḥ priyasya putrasya vivāsanāturaḥ | gate 'rdharātre bhṛśaduḥkhapīḍitas tadā jahau prānam udāradarśanaḥ* ||

155 See 2.109.21–110.13.

156 3.8 .3–4: *trīṇyeva vyasanānyatra kāmajāni bhavantyuta | mithyāvākyaṃ paramakaṃ tasmād gurutarāvubhau || paradārābhigamanaṃ vinā vairaaṃ ca raudratā . . . |*

157 3.51.6–7: īdṛśaṃ garhitaṃ karma kathaṃ kṛtvā na lajjase | *striyāś ca haraṇaṃ nīca rahite ca parasya ca* || etc.

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other women;[158] that even if one is sinless, association with a sinful person would lead to disaster.[159] Lakṣmaṇa chides Rāma for giving way to anger and says that he should not punish the whole world for the act of one person.[160] Rāma's famous statement of great moral value is that one should give refuge, even at the cost of one's life, to whoever seeks it[161]and that it is a sin not to give refuge to one who seeks it. When during the Laṅkā war Indrajit made himself invisible and killed several hundreds of the monkeys in Rāma's army, Lakṣmaṇa was incensed and said that he would use the brahmāstra and wipe out all the Rākṣasas, Rāma advised him exactly the same way that Lakṣmaṇa had advised *him* when he, Rāma, overcome by anger at the loss of Sītā threatened to wipe out the whole world: Rāma told Lakṣmaṇa that he should not kill all the Rākṣasas because of one bad rākṣasa, [162] that is, that one should not punish a whole group for the sins of one person. Similarly, in the a–p chapter 2 Sītā says *that one should not condemn a whole group for the actions of a few.*

Towards the end of the Rāmāyaṇa, when Rāvaṇa had been killed and Vibhiṣaṇa was reluctant to perform the funeral rites for Rāvaṇa, Rāma chides him saying that one should not bear any enmity towards another after he is dead.[163] Quite famous is Sītā's statement that whether people are good or bad, a noble person would treat them with compassion.[164] A mere two sargas later, the a–p episode unfolds.

158 [3.38.30 ab] = CE 3.719*: *paradārābhimarśāt tu nānyat pāpataraṃ mahat* | 3.36.26: *bhava svadāraniratataḥ svakulaṃ rakṣa rākṣasa* ||

159 3.36.22: Mārīca advises Rāvaṇa: *akurvanto 'pi pāpāni śucayaḥ pāpasaṃśrayāt* | *parapāpair vinaśyanti matsyā nāgahrade yathā* || [3.39.21] = CE 3.740* lines 1–2 : *bahavaḥ sādhavo loke yuktā dharmam anuṣṭhitāḥ* | *pareṣām aparādhena vinaṣṭāḥ saparicchadāḥ* ||

160 3.61.9: *naikasya tu kṛte lokān vināśayitum arhasi* |

161 See 6.12.11–21, especially śloka 12.15: ārto vā yadi vā dṛptaḥ pareṣāṃ śaraṇaṃ gataḥ | ariḥ prāṇān parityajya rakṣitavyaḥ kṛtātmanā ||

162 See 3.61.9 quoted above. In 6.67.37: Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa: *naikasya heto rakṣāṃsi pṛthivyāṃ hantum arhasi* ||

163 6.99.39: *maraṇāntāni vairāṇi . . .*

164 6.101.36: *pāpānāṃ vā śubhānāṃ vā vadhārhāṇām plavaṅgama* |
kāryaṃ kāruṇyaṃ āryeṇa na kaścid nāparādhyati ||

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§7.1 The a–p episode coming at the end of the Rāmāyaṇa is a momentous one and must certainly have some lesson to teach; perhaps because it is a momentous one, with its drama unfolding at a fast pace through four *sargas*, the lesson is not stated explicitly; or *perhaps a few ślokas are missing*. We are left to discover for ourselves what lesson the a–p episode teaches. Looking at the a–p chapters, we saw that it was the belief held by 'ordinary', uncultured men that a married woman who had been in another man's custody cannot be accepted as pure and should therefore be rejected); Sītā argued that those assumptions are not valid and are unworthy of men of culture. The Devas upheld Sītā's argument. Sītā, by her glorious re–emergence from the fire, also proved that she was right. A lesson was thus taught, namely, that *a woman should not be rejected simply because she had been abducted, and that one should not condemn a whole group for the actions of a few.*

§7.2 Vālmīkī's epic poem contains numerous incidents, which serve the poet's didactic purpose of showing what true *dharma* is. His didactic purpose and technique have been discussed below, with several examples, in chapter 5 on 'debates'. The examples discussed there give us a correct picture of Vālmīkī's didactic technique involved. The *seemingly* valid position, that we may call the *pūrvapakṣa,* is given first (sometimes even preceded, and/or followed, by some words of praise) and then the really correct, or true position, that we may call the *siddhānta*.

§7.3 Let us now look at the Rāma–Sītā conversation or "debate" in the a–p episode. Rāma's words rejecting Sītā form the *pūrvapakṣa: "A man of honour cannot take back a woman who had lived in another man's house for any period of time."* Sītā's reply contains the *siddhānta* and we saw that Sītā was proved to be right. The a–p episode is then seen to be merely an act put on for didactic purposes.

§8.0 *But before it can be claimed that the a–p episode was only putting on an act, a few questions have to be answered. We start with the questions: How could Rāma calmly watch Sītā entering the fire? Did Sītā have no choice, why did she choose to do a–p?*

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§8.1 There was in fact no need for the a–p in order for Sītā to prove her chastity. A–p has always been considered to be the ultimate vindication of absolute purity. Rāma, who knew that Sītā was absolutely pure, would have felt sure that Sītā would emerge out of the fire with glory;[165]his confidence would have been reinforced also by the knowledge that when Hanumān set Laṅkā on fire, Sītā was not at all hurt by the fire.[166] For her part, Sītā, who was absolutely pure, would have had no fear of the fire. We recall also that upon learning that Hanumān's tail had been set on fire she had prayed to Agni deva, "If I have really been a *pativratā* . . ., may you be cool to Hanumān!", and Hanumān had felt the fire to be cool.[167]

§ 8.2 The Rāmāyaṇa indicates that when two persons are closely bonded in love and affection they can read each other's thought. It says that "Sītā could read clearly even that which was in Rāma's innermost heart"[168] as she had "penetrated the depths of her husband's mind".[169] It says explicitly of Rāma that he could read Sītā's thoughts through even the slightest of her facial expressions.[170] It is to be noted that Rāma did not *ask* Sītā to undergo the fire–test. And Sītā did not do a–p as an act of self–immolation due to her husband's rejecting her; before entering the fire she called on the divine witness Agni deva, the Lord of Fire, to protect

165 The feeling that a morally pure person who enters a fire will not be harmed by the fire has been in India for a very long time. It is implicit in Sītā's calling upon the Devas to proclaim her purity by protecting her when she did a–p. The *Padmapurāṇa* I. ch.50 says that Adroha did a–p in order to prove his purity. Many women have no doubt perished by doing an agni–praveśa that was forced on them.

166 Hanumān reported to the monkeys and to Rāma all that happened in Laṅkā. See in particular 5.56.135–137 and 5.63.3–4.

167 See 5.51.22–27, 30.

168 1.76.14: *manasvī tadgatas tasyā hṛdi samarpitaḥ* |
1.76.16–17: *antarjātam api vyaktam ākhyāti hṛdayaṃ hṛdā* | *tasya bhūyo viśeṣeṇa maithilī janakātmajā* |
C.E. 1394* on 1.76.16: *tathaiva rāmaḥ sītāyāḥ prāṇebhyo 'pi priyo 'bhavat* | *hṛdayaṃ hyeva jānāti prītiyogaṃ parasparam* ||

169 5.4.21: *bhartur manaḥ śrīmadanupraviṣṭāṃ . . .*

170 6.116.71 refers to Rāma as *"iṅgitajñaḥ* "; from Sītā's face he understood that Sītā wanted to present her necklace to Hanumān. She looked at the monkeys and at Rāma again and again; Rāma merely said, "Give it to whomsoever you please"; Sītā understood from his face that he agreed with her desire to present the necklace to Hanumān.

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her if her heart had always been with Rāma and if she had maintained her pure character;[171] that is, to testify that she was a chaste wife.

§8.3 An agni–praveśa has a shocking effect on people, jolting their conscience. That could be the reason why Rāma and Sītā were putting on an act whose script called for Sītā's entry into the fire and subsequent emergence out of it totally unscathed.

§8.4 A clue may be found in Rāma's specifically instructing Vibhīṣaṇa to bring Sītā to his presence *after* she was bathed and anointed and decorated with ornaments etc.[172] Like any one eager to meet a loved one after a long separation, she wanted to go and see her husband immediately, as she was, unbathed and unadorned, her hair unbraided, and dressed only in the well–worn and soiled dress that she was then wearing.[173] She said so to Vibhīṣaṇa, but he insisted that she should follow her husband's instructions.[174] Sensing that Rāma had some specific reason, and that she would know it once she met him in person, she complied and allowed herself to be bathed and adorned.

§8.5 Vālmīki leaves it for the audience to guess what might have been in Rāma's mind. Perhaps Rāma wanted Sītā to do a–p and figured that Sītā would choose to do so (and that she would then emerge out of it unscathed — for he had absolute faith in Sītā's purity and that the fire would not hurt her). To make the suspicions in the harsh words he was going to utter to Sītā seem plausible, he might have wanted her to

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171 6.104.24: *yathā me hṛdayaṃ nityaṃ nāpasarpati rāghavāt | tathā lokasya sākṣī māṃ sarvataḥ pātu pāvakaḥ* ||
CE 6.3236*: *yathā māṃ śuddhacāritrāṃ duṣṭāṃ jānāti rāghavaḥ* |
It is interesting to compare what Sītā says in the Uttarakāṇḍa: she says that if she was pure, the earth should open up and receive her: 7.88.10: *yathāhaṃ rāghavād anyaṃ manasāpi na cintaye | tathā me mādhavī devī vivaraṃ dātum arhati* ||

172 6.102.7: *divyāṅgarāgāṃ vaidehīṃ divyābharaṇabhūṣitām | ha sītāṃ śiraḥsnātāṃ upasthāpaya māciram* ||

173 6.102.10: Sītā tells Vibhīṣaṇa: *asnātā draṣṭum icchāmi bhartāraṃ rākṣaseśvara* ||
After the Laṅkā war was over, Rāma wanted to start on the journey to Ayodhyā to see Bharata, without tarrying to have a ceremonial bath and putting on nice clothes and ornaments etc. Rāma said to Vibhīṣaṇa: 6.109.6: *taṃ vinā kaikayīputraṃ bharataṃ dharmacāriṇam | na me snānaṃ bahu mataṃ vastrāṇy ābharaṇāni ca* ||

174 6.102.11: Vibhīṣaṇa told Sītā: *yathā āha rāmo bhartā te, tat tathā kartum arhasi* ||

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appear decked in all her finery, so that the 'ordinary men' in the 'world at large' may conclude she had been living in luxury in Rāvaṇa's palace. An 'ordinary' man would then conclude that Sītā's character had been bad, *but, by the end of the a–p episode would realize how wrong his conclusion was. Thus, with especially Sītā's condemnation of Rāma's harsh words as words only an 'ordinary' man would utter, the world is taught a lesson on morality and justice.*

But the act is not over yet. Sītā asked Lakṣmaṇa to light the fire. Rāma knew she would come out of it unscathed. But Lakṣmaṇa is perplexed.

§9.0 *What was Lakṣmaṇa's reaction to Rāma's harsh words to Sītā, and to Sītā asking him to light the fire? Did he protest to Rāma, or did he merely light the fire without even a murmur of protest?*

§9.1 The exchange of words between Rāma and Sītā threw Lakṣmaṇa into a sad and perplexed reverie.[175] Vālmīki says that when Sītā asked Lakṣmaṇa to light the fire, "Lakṣmaṇa, overcome by *anger*, looked sharply at Rāma's face,"[176] that Rāma's countenance indicated to him what was in Rāma's mind and that thereupon he lit the fire.[177]

§9.2 Thus, the Rāmāyaṇa speaks of some unspoken communication between Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma. What was the communication?

It is easy to guess what Lakṣmaṇa's sharp look would have conveyed to Rāma. He was saying in effect to Rāma:

I know, and so do Hanumān and Sugrīva and Vibhīṣaṇa, that you know very well that Sītā is chaste and pure; we are stunned that you, talk of Sītā's chastity as having come under suspicion. Also, how can you say that you have no more any affection for her? I know, and Hanumān and Sugrīva and others know too, how deeply sunk in sorrow and despair you have been because of separation from Sītā. Time and again I have had to chide you to rise above your despair and apply yourself instead

175 6.104.17: *abravīt lakṣmaṇaṃ sītā dīnaṃ dhyānaparaṃ sthitam* ||

176 6.104.20: . . . *lakṣmaṇaḥ paravīrahā | amarṣavaśamāpanno rāghavānanaṃ aikṣata* ||

177 6.104.21: *sa vijñāya manaś chandaṃ rāmasyākārasūcitam | citāṃ cakāra saumitrir mate rāmasya vīryavān* ||

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to the task ahead, namely the recovery of Sītā. Sugrīva too had to again and again comfort you, saying that your grief due to separation for Sītā would soon be over, and promising to restore Sītā to you,[178] and also to chide you likewise, several times, that you should not be drowned in grief on account of her loss.[179] Even just a few days ago, your mind was dwelling only on Sītā, and not on your or your family's honour. Didn't Hanumān also refer to it just a few minutes ago when he said that all our efforts and this war were for the sake of Sītā?[180] You knew from Jaṭāyu that it was Rāvaṇa who had abducted Sītā. If you thought that Rāvaṇa had insulted you, or your family, and all that you cared for was to avenge the insult and not the recovery of Sītā, you should have proceeded against him, instead of letting thousands of monkeys scour the world to find where *Sītā* was being kept. Indeed, after Sītā was abducted, you have not mentioned even once the need to recover your or your family's honour — till a few moments ago today! How can you say then, repeatedly, that the war against Rāvaṇa was to avenge your or your family's honour and not for the sake of Sītā? Did you put the lives of Sugrīva and the monkeys and bears at risk for the purpose of salvaging your and your family's honour? See how many tens of thousands of the *vānara* army have been killed in this war! Recall what Sugrīva had promised you. He promised only that he would do everything in his power *so that you would recover* Sītā.[181] He reiterated this again, too.[182] Even Vālī knew this, for he told you, as he lay dying, that if you had approached him first for help in recovering Sītā, he would have recovered Sītā for you.[183] Let me repeat,

178 4.6.4–6: *bhāryāviyogajaṃ duḥkhaṃ nacirāt tvaṃ vimokṣyase | ahaṃ tāṃ ānayiṣyāmi . . . || . . . aham ānīya dāsyāmi tava bhāryāṃ . . . || tyaja śokaṃ mahābāho tāṃ kāntāṃ ānayiṣyāmi te ||*

179 4.7.5: *alaṃ vaiklavyam ālambya dhairyam ātmagataṃ smara | . . .* 4.7.8: bāṣpam āpatitaṃ dhairyān nigrahītuṃ tvam arhasi | *maryādāṃ sattvayuktānāṃ dhṛtiṃ notsraṣṭum arhasi* || 4.7.11: *pauruṣaṃ śraya śokasya nāntaraṃ dātum arhasi* ||

180 6.102.2: *yan nimitto 'yam ārambhaḥ karmaṇāṃ ca phalodayaḥ | tāṃ devīṃ śokasaṃtaptāṃ maithilīṃ draṣṭum arhasi* ||

181 4.6.5: *rasātale vā vartantīṃ vartantīṃ vā nabhastale | aham ānīya dāsyāmi tava bharyām arindama* ||

182 4.7.3: *satyaṃ tu pratijānāmi tyaja śokam arindama | kariṣyāmi tathā yatnaṃ yathā prāpsyasi maithilīm* ||

183 4.17.42: *nyastāṃ sāgaratoye vā pātāle vāpi maithilīm* | ānayeyaṃ tavādeśāt śvetām aśvatarīm iva ||

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I know that you know very well that Sītā is chaste and pure; I know how deeply sunk in sorrow you have been ever since Sītā was abducted; you never felt her abduction as a challenge to your or to your family's honour. How can you now speak harsh words of rejection to your wife Sītā? She is my mother,[184] a deity whom I worship.[185] I cannot bring myself to light the fire for Sītā! "

Rāma's countenance probably conveyed to Lakṣmaṇa a message like the following: "Do not worry, dear Lakṣmaṇa! The agni–praveśa is only to teach a lesson to the ordinary men of the world. Of course, I know Sītā to be pure and chaste, a *pativratā* and I love her most dearly. I assure you; Sītā will not be hurt by the fire, but will emerge from it with great glory! Recall that when all of Laṅkā was ablaze, the fire did not dare touch Sītā. So, have no fear and light the fire as Sītā asked you to."

Thus assured, Lakṣmaṇa lit the fire.

§10.0 *One may ask how we can say that Lakṣmaṇa read such a message in Rāma's countenance and not the message that Rāma was simply adamant and wanted him to light the fire, which he did meekly?*

§10.1 Although it is true that Lakṣmaṇa regarded himself as a faithful servant of Rāma, he would also admonish Rāma if the latter behaved in a manner, which did not meet with his approval. A few instances are given below. Although he and his brothers were all devoted to the service of their father Daśaratha, when the latter wanted Rāma to be exiled and Rāma meekly agreed, Lakṣmaṇa was so indignant that he said he was ready to take up arms against Daśaratha and seize power,[186] and had to be calmed by Rāma. When Rāma said that he should go on exile to the forest, accepting it as his fate,[187] Lakṣmaṇa retorted with anger that Rāma seemed to be scared that he might lose the people's respect if he

184 As Lakṣmaṇa's mother Sumitrā adjured him: 2.35.8: *rāmaṃ daśarathaṃ viddhi māṃ viddhi janakātmajām* | Also, as Sītā said of Lakṣmaṇa to Hanumān: 5.36.46: *pitṛvad vartate rāme mātṛvad māṃ samācaran* |

185 Lakṣmaṇa addresses Sītā: 3.43.26: *daivataṃ bhavatī mama* ||

186 2.18.8–11.

187 See 2.19.18–20.

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decided not to go on exile;[188] Lakṣmaṇa said that one should conquer fate by one's valorous effort.[189] When Rāma was sunk in sorrow after Sītā's abduction and got angry and threatened to destroy the whole world if Sītā was not restored to him at once,[190] Lakṣmaṇa pointed out to him that it was wrong to do so.[191] When Rāma was overcome by grief due to the absence of Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa asked him not to drown himself in grief like an 'ordinary' man;[192] on a later occasion, he chides Rāma and urges him to cast off his grief and make firm determination instead to recover Sītā.[193] On a second occasion too when Rāma was overcome by anger and was about to discharge powerful arrows at the ocean, arrows so powerful that they would have destroyed the ocean and all the animals in it, Lakṣmaṇa admonished him that he should not give way to anger.[194] *Note also that although he was a younger brother of Rāma and thus ranked below him, Lakṣmaṇa often admonished him, or advised him, and that Rāma gratefully appreciated his advice.*

§10.2 It is clear then that if upon casting an angry look at Rāma, all that Lakṣmaṇa read in Rāma's face was a mere order to light the fire, he would have protested against Rāma's decision. But after reading Rāma's countenance,[195] his anger apparently vanished and he lit the fire without any fear. His anger would not have vanished and he would not have boldly lit the fire if he had not read a re-assuring message in Rāma's countenance — a message, which said that he could light the fire without any fear that Sītā would be hurt.

188 2.20.6: *dharmadoṣaprasaṅgena lokasyānatiśaṅkayā | kathaṃ hy etad asaṃbhrāntas tvadvidho vaktum arhati* ||

189 2.20.11: *viklavo vīryahīno yaḥ sa daivam anuvartate | vīrāḥ sambhāvitātmāno na daivam paryupāsate* ||

190 3.60.52.

191 See 3.61.9–12.

192 3.62.13: śocituṃ nārhase vīra yathānyaḥ prākṛtas tathā ||

193 4.26.9: Lakṣmaṇa says to Rāma: *alaṃ vīra vyathāṃ gatvā na śocitum arhasi* | śocato hyavasīdantu sarvathā viditaṃ hi te || 4.26.12: *samunmūlaya śokaṃ taṃ vyavasāyaṃ sthiraṃ kuru* || similarly in 4.29.15–20.

194 See CE 6.244* lines 1–4; the lines 3–4 read: *saumitrir utpatya viniḥśvasantaṃ mā meti coktvā dhanur ālalambe* |

195 6.104.21: *sa vijñāya manaś chandam rāmasya ākārasūcitam | citāṃ cakāra . . .* ||

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§10.3 Lakṣmaṇa could read what was in Rāma's mind, just as Rāma and Sītā could read each other's minds, as stated earlier (§4.2). Vālmīki observes that two persons closely bound by love and affection can each read in their hearts what is in the other's heart.[196] The poet has described Lakṣmaṇa as Rāma's heart and soul in a different body,[197] that Lakṣmaṇa was as dear to Rāma as his own life;[198] Sītā even said to Hanumān, "Lakṣmaṇa is dearer to Rāma than even I".[199] It is therefore not surprising that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa could read each other's thoughts.

§11.0 Thus there is impressive evidence in support of the view that the a–p episode *was an act, a drama, put on by Rāma and Sītā for teaching the world a moral lesson. But this evidence presented above was* assembled *with the help of* numerous quotes from each of the six kāṇḍas of the Rāmāyaṇa. But the poet's audience —– most, if not all of his audience — could not have assembled in their minds all the evidence presented. *Since Vālmīki composed his poem for his audience, we have to examine how they would have* reacted to the a–p episode.

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196 1.76.16: *tasyāś ca bhartā dviguṇaṃ hṛdaye parivartate* | *antarjātam api vyaktam ākhyāti hṛdayaṃ hṛdā* || 5.4.21 *bhartur manaḥ śrīmad anupraviṣṭām . . .* |

197 Vālmīki says in 17–1.17.16: *sarvapriyakaras tasya rāmasyāpi śarīrataḥ* || *akṣmaṇo lakshmisampanno bahiḥprāṇa ivāparaḥ* | Śūrpaṇakhā says: 3.32.13: *rāmasya dakṣiṇo bāhur nityaṃ prāṇo bahiścaraḥ* || Rāvaṇa's spy Śuka also says: 6.19.24: *rāmasya dakṣiṇo bāhur nityam prāṇo bahiścaraḥ* ||

198 In [2.31.10] (Southern recension) [Rāma says of Lakṣmaṇa]: *priyaḥ prāṇasamo vaśyo vijeyaś ca sakhā ca me* || CE 2.716*, line 3 reads: *priyaḥ prāṇasamo bhrātā sahāś ca sakhā ca me* | Rāvaṇa's spy Śuka reported to him: 6.19.23: *eṣo 'sya lakṣmaṇo nāma bhrātā prāṇasamaḥ priyaḥ* | See also 6.19.24 quoted in the previous note.

199 5.36.48: Sītā says, using hyperbole (exaggeration): *mattaḥ priyataro nityaṃ bhrātā rāmasya lakṣmaṇaḥ* | It would however be an error to interpret Sītā as saying that she was less dear to Rāma than Lakṣmaṇa (and then extrapolate it as implying gender inequality etc.) Sītā's statement is a parallel form of the *nahi nindā* principle, which is applicable here; there are two things X, Y and one of them, say Y, is praised or ranked higher than the other. But there is no real comparison involved; the objective is not to decry X, but to praise Y. After all, as Sītā had said to Hanumān even earlier: "No one is as dear to Rāma as I — not even his mother or father or anyone else" (see 5.34.29 quoted in the chapter 'Rāma's love for Sītā'). (Note the priority of mention of the mother; as in the upaniṣadvākya *mātṛ devo bhava pitṛdevo bhava;* also, the phrase *pitā mātā* never occurs, but always *mātā pitā*; this is true of languages like Tamil also.)

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§11.1 We must note that right from the earliest days, the Rāmāyaṇa (as practically every other text also) was communicated orally–aurally. *Indeed,* unlike a western person or others whose first contact with the Rāmāyaṇa is through a printed text, people in India cannot recall when their first contact with the Rāmāyaṇa story was; for they must have heard it in early childhood. (Many have heard it before they could understand speech or could speak, for scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa are sung as lullabies.) This means that every time they listen to the Rāmāyaṇa story, they are listening to a story they have already heard, a story that they already know at least in its outline. *Almost certainly,* this was so even in Vālmīkī's time. Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa itself *must have been* composed taking into account Rāma–legends that were already current and which Vālmīki knew. At any rate, the *Bālakāṇḍa* says that Nārada gave Vālmīki the skeleton of the story and that Vālmīki then added the flesh to it.

Therefore, while the a–p episode will shock Vālmīkī's audience, it will do so in a way different from the way a typical western or westernized person today will be shocked by it.

§12.0 We shall now see how the poet Vālmīki prepares his "audience" for the a–p chapter and its lesson.

§12.1 *Firstly, the audience is assured that the fire is incapable of harming Sītā:* The *Sundarakāṇḍa* says that after Hanumān had set Laṅkā ablaze, for a moment he feared that the fire would have consumed Sītā; but then he thought to himself that the noble and kind Sītā would not have perished, "for fire does not burn fire" and that fire would not dare even to touch her, protected as she was by the power of her impeccable character as a *pativratā.*[200] Vālmīki adds that Hanumān then heard voices of the Cāraṇas (heavenly bards) expressing wonder that although the whole of Laṅkā was burnt, Sītā was not hurt at all.[201]

Secondly, the audience is again assured of Sītā's chastity and its power, and Rāma is described to be Viṣṇu himself, not directly by Vālmīki but through

200 5.53.7: *vinaṣṭā jānakī vyaktaṃ na hy adagdhaḥ pradṛśyate* | 5.53.18: *athavā cārusarvāṅgī rakṣitā svena tejasā* | *na naśiṣyati kalyāṇī nāgnir agnau pravartate* ||

201 5.53.26: [Cāraṇas (heavenly bards) to one another]: *dagdheyaṃ nagarī laṅkā sāṭṭaprakāratoraṇā* | *jānakī na ca dagdheti vismayo 'dbhuta eva naḥ* ||

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Manḍodarī's words uttered only slightly before the a–p episode. Vālmīki records Manḍodarī's lament and reproachful words to Rāvaṇa, as he lay dead. She said, "Creating an illusion (māyā) [Sītā?], Death itself has come to you in the form of Rāma who is Viṣṇu himself.[202] You insulted Sītā, who is superior in character to even Rohiṇī and Arundhatī, and is totally devoted to her husband; that *pativratā"s tapas* has burnt you! "[203] Manḍodarī's words reflect the belief that *pātivratya* is a woman's supreme *tapas* and endows her with a blazing energy more fiery than fire itself.

§12.2 Hanumān too likened the virtue of a *pativratā* to a blazing fire when he warned Rāvaṇa that the glory of Sītā's virtue (as a pativratā) will burn Laṅkā to ashes.[204] Hanumān's thought (mentioned earlier), that the Laṅkā fire would not hurt Sītā since "fire does not burn fire" is expressed even more dramatically by Kamban in his telling of the Rāmāyaṇa story. He says of Sītā's a–p that as soon as she entered the fire, Agni came out of the fire handing Sītā back to Rāma, saying that he, the Fire–god, was unable to bear the blazing fiery power of the *pātivratya* of Sītā.

§12.3 Therefore, even though Rāma's harsh words and rejection of Sītā in the a–p chapter will really shock the audience, they will be eagerly looking forward to see the re–emergence of Sītā from the fire,[205] disproving the allegations in Rāma's harsh words. However, *when a–p chapter 1 is being narrated,* the audience would still wonder: "How could Rāma, who is the Lord Viṣṇu himself, be so harsh towards Sītā? Did he really entertain any doubt about Sītā's character? What lesson are we

202 Mandodarī says to Rāvaṇa: 6.99.10: *athavā rāmarūpeṇa vāsavaḥ svayam āgataḥ | māyāṃ tava vināśāya vidhāya–apratitarkitām* || See also CE 6.3114* line 8: *mānuṣaṃ rūpam āsthāya viṣṇuḥ satyaparākramaḥ* ||

203 6.99.15: *arundhatyā viśiṣṭāṃ tāṃ rohiṇyāścāpi durmate | sītāṃ dharṣayatā mānyāṃ tvayā hy asadṛśaṃ kṛtam* || CE 6.3116* line 5: *pativratāyās tapasā nūnaṃ dagdho 'si me prabho* ||

204 5.49.35: *sītāyās tejasā dagdhāṃ rāmakopaprapīḍitām | dahyamānām imāṃ paśya purīṃ sāṭṭapratolikām* ||

205 It is probably true from the time of Vālmīki himself that nobody in India can recall when he/she first heard the story of Rāma; therefore, everyone who listens to an exposition of the Rāmāyaṇa already knows the broad outline of the story.

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to draw from this?" In the end, the audience comes to know that Rāma never really had any doubts about Sītā; that Rāma used the words and action of an 'ordinary' man, a vulgar, uncultured man but did not really mean them, and that the a–p episode teaches that one should rise above the level of an 'ordinary' man. This lesson is taught most of the times Rāma acted earlier too like an 'ordinary' man, but nowhere with as much force as in the a–p episode.

§13.0 *One may* however be puzzled that Rāma, who is described as a truthful person, was only putting on an act when he rejected Sītā with harsh words. How could a truthful person put on an act? The answer to that is that indeed Rāma is described as a truthful person. Vālmīki presents him as an ideal man whom all men should try to hold as a model and emulate. But Vālmīki does not paint a one–dimensional picture of Rāma as an ideal person so unlike other men that people will despair of trying to be like him. He presents a picture of Rāma as having many qualities that lesser men also have. Just like lesser men, he loves, plays, weeps, jokes, gets angry and argues. Sometimes for the sake of argument, he even articulates a position that is contrary to his own feelings. Thus, on a few occasions, he says things he does not really believe in, as a lesser man might do — *but immediately or very soon afterwards, he corrects himself, or even apologizes.* (And thereby teaches a lesson, too!)

§13.1 As for Rāma's harsh words to Sītā that her character had come under suspicion and that he had no longer affection for her, etc., words which triggered Sītā's a–p, we note that very soon after that, Rāma said that he had had no doubts about Sītā's character and that he loved her deeply and that his harsh words were only for the sake of the world at large. Those words were part of an act put on by a truthful person in order to teach a valuable lesson to the world.

§13.2 We should bear in mind that elsewhere too Vālmīki describes some scenes where a person says something, expressing some doubt, or an argument, but not because of a real doubt or an argument born out of one's conviction. Vālmīki does so in order to underline and clarify the matter (and also teach a lesson to the world) by the response offered.

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For instance, when Bharata came, with his army, to meet Rāma in Citrakuṭa, Bharadvāja Maharṣi said to him, "I hope you have not come in order to do some harm to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa so that you can rule over Ayodhyā in peace." Bharadvāja said so, even though he knew very well that Bharata was full of intense love and devotion to Rāma. As he explained, his question was only a means to spread Bharata's fame (2.84.20).

§14.0 The agni–praveśa chapters help Vālmīki to round off his narration of the story of Rāma *with the revelation, made by* Brahmā and other devas themselves, that it is Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (Śrī) who have come in human form as Rāma and Sītā. This clear revelation of Rāma's and Sītā's identities is necessary for the completion of the Rāmāyaṇa. For their divinity is not clearly revealed, till then in the Rāmāyaṇa. (It should be noted that portions of the *Bālakāṇḍa* are considered to have been added after the rest of the Rāmāyaṇa had been completed.)

§15.0 It is as a human that Rāma has to kill Rāvaṇa.[206] We see that right from the beginning Rāma acts as a human would, generally as a human of extraordinary character, and yet, on a few occasions, displaying human weakness. Certainly, after the abduction of Sītā, Rāma plays the role of a human faithfully up to and including the a–p chapters. That explains his sinking into deep sorrow, just like a man, at Sītā's absence from his side. We have already seen that Rāma was so deeply sunk in sorrow after Sītā's abduction that Lakṣmaṇa exhorted him not to grieve "like an 'ordinary' man".[207] On the eve of the crossing of the ocean, Rāma was sunk in deep sorrow and Sugrīva had to exhort him not to be sunk in sorrow and despair like an 'ordinary' man.[208] He wept like an ordinary man would, when Lakṣmaṇa was felled unconscious during the war,

206 The Devas had requested Viṣṇu (1.14.19: *tatra tvaṃ mānuṣo bhūtvā pravṛddhaṃ lokakaṇṭakam | avadhyaṃ daivatair viṣṇo samare jahi rāvaṇam* ||) and Viṣṇu had agreed.

207 3.62.13: Lakṣmaṇa addresses Rāma: śocitum nārhase vīra yathānyaḥ ***prākṛtas*** *tathā* ||

208 6.2.2: Sugrīva to Rāma: "Why are you sunk in sorrow and despair like some ordinary (uncultured) man?": *kim tvaṃ saṃtapyase vīra yathānyaḥ* ***prākṛtas*** *tathā*?

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first in the battle against Indrajit and again in the battle against Rāvaṇa.[209] When he heard Hanumān's [incorrect] report that Indrajit had killed Sītā, Rāma did not act like an all-knowing God, but fell to the ground quite stupefied.[210] (In order to demoralize Rāma and his army, Indrajit had created a māyā Sītā and "killed" the illusory Sītā.[211]) On the last day of the war, Rāma's charioteer Mātalī asks him why he appears not to know that the time to kill Rāvaṇa had come, and says that Rāma should use the *brahmāstra* against Rāvaṇa. Later still, in the a-p chapter 2, Sītā upbraids him: "Why do you talk rudely like an 'ordinary' man to an 'ordinary' woman? . . . Like a worthless man you are overcome by anger and calumniating womankind itself!"[212] And the Devas too remonstrate with Rāma: "How can you abandon Sītā like an 'ordinary' man?"[213]

§15.1 It is as a human, and as reflecting views of 'ordinary' men at large, that he spoke harshly and rejected Sītā in the a-p chapter 1. Rāma was only stating a simple fact when he told the Devas that he regarded himself as a human. We must note also that it was not because of any divine powers of his own that he fought and killed Rāvaṇa; the divine weapons he used had all been given to him by Brahmā and by the Rishis-Viśvāmitra and Agastya; he had also the divine bows that Varuṇa had given to Janaka.[214] Vālmīki generally does not explicitly reveal, before the a-p chapter 3, that Rāma is Viṣṇu. (An exception is the Bālakāṇḍa that was probably added after the rest of the Rāmāyaṇa was completed.).[215]

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209 Rāma, revived, sorrows for Lakṣmaṇa: see 21-6.39.4.
Rāma sorrows for Lakṣmaṇa who was felled by Rāvaṇa: see 8-6.89.2.

210 6.70.10: *tasya tad vacanaṃ śrutvā rāghavaḥ śokamūrcchitaḥ | nipapāta tadā bhūmau chinnamūla iva drumaḥ* ||

211 6.68.28: *tam evam uktvā rudatīṃ sītāṃ māyāmayīṃ tataḥ |*
śitadhāreṇa khaḍgena nijaghāna indrajit svayam ||

212 Sītā addresses Rāma: 6.104.5: *kim māṃ asadṛśaṃ vākyam īdṛśaṃ śrotradāruṇam | rūkṣaṃ śrāvayase vīra* ***prākṛtaḥ*** *prākṛtām iva* || and 6.104.14: *tvayā tu naraśārdūla krodham evānuvartatā |* ***laghuneva manuṣyeṇa*** *strītvameva puraskṛtam* ||

213 The Devas tell Rāma: 6.105.8: *upekṣase ca vaidehīm mānuṣaḥ* ***prākṛto*** *yathā* ||

214 See 2.28.12

215 Only after Sītā enters the fire do the Devas declare that Rāma is Lord Viṣṇu. The Southern recension says that, earlier, when Rāma fought and killed the rākṣasas led by Khara and Dūṣaṇa, the Devas merely exclaimed that Rāma's prowess was *like* that of Viṣṇu, but did not reveal that Rāma was Viṣṇu.
CE 3.581*, lines 7-8: [Devas exclaim]: *aho bata mahatkarma rāmasya viditātmanaḥ | aho vīryaṃ aho dākṣyaṃ viṣṇor iva hi dṛśyate* ||

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§16.0 One should note that the Rāmāyaṇa says not only that Rāma was of noble character, learned, compassionate etc. but also that on several occasions (after the abduction of Sītā) he behaved like a man with human weaknesses; indeed, he behaves on occasion as an 'ordinary' man would do. Wherever this is mentioned prior to the a–p chapter, it is also indicated how a man without such weakness would behave. Through Rāma's great and noble qualities, as well as his human weaknesses (including when feigned, as in the a–p chapter), the Rāmāyaṇa teaches lessons on ideal family life, nobility, morality and justice and encourages people to try to emulate Rāma.

§17.0 The agni–praveśa episode has been interpreted above, with justification and in a manner consistent with the rest of the Rāmāyaṇa. A literal reading of the episode without reference to the rest of the Rāmāyaṇa will not present a proper picture.

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5
On some debates in the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa

§1 Vālmīkī's epic poem contains numerous incidents, which serve the poet's didactic purpose of showing what true *dharma is.* In particular, this didactic purpose is behind the several 'debates' that he describes in the poem. Some instances are: (1) the discussion that Rāma had with Kausalyā and with Lakṣmaṇa on his (Rāma's) decision to go on exile (2.18.2 ff]); (2) the discussion between Rāma and Sītā on Sītā's desire to accompany Rāma into exile (2. *sargas* 26–27); (3) the discussion between Bharata and Rāma when Bharata tried to persuade Rāma to return to Ayodhyā and assume the kingship (2. *sargas* 98–99); (4): the Vālī–Rāma conversation from 4.17.13 to 4.19.1; and (5) the Rāma–Sītā conversation in the agni-praveśa episode. See in particular 6.103.19–20 and 6.104.5–7. Before we discuss the 'debates', some general observations are in order.

§2 As in any debate or even court proceedings, the presentation by each side would superficially appear to be sound and reasonable. The presentations have to be judged with care before coming to a conclusion. Hindu philosophers advocating their particular system of philosophy would first present the views *opposed* to theirs, as the *pūrvapakṣa* and then argue in favour of their own views as the *siddhānta*. This is similar to the didactic technique — that we shall find it convenient to call the *pūrvapakṣa/siddhānta* technique — adopted by Vālmīki in presenting the debates in the Rāmāyaṇa. The *pūrvapakṣa* of any debate is often preceded by a remark by Vālmīki that one could see it as reasonable and correct; the one significant exception is the Jābāli–Rāma conversation

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where Jābāli's arguments (the *pūrvapakṣa*) are condemned by the poet even at the outset as contrary to *dharma.*

§3.1 In regard to the debate (1) of §1: Kausalyā and Lakṣmaṇa were desolate and lamenting that Daśaratha had given his word that Rāma be exiled to the forest for 14 years (2.18.1). In verses 2.18.2–15, Lakṣmaṇa says that Daśaratha's agreeing to the demand for Rāma's exile is most unjust, that the king had become old and 'become a child' and that Rāma should seize power, deposing the king by force of arms; in verses 2.18.17–24 Kausalyā first asks Rāma to pay attention to what Lakṣmaṇa had said, and asked him not to heed Kaikeyī's "*unrighteous* words"; she said, "My most *righteous* son (*dharmajña*), I want you to act according to *dharma,* stay here and do your supreme duty (*dharma*)".[216] Of course, it is the duty of a son to obey his mother; the Upaniṣats say that one should treat one's mother as God and seem to give priority to that over obedience to one's father (*mātṛdevo bhava, pitṛdevo bhava*). Lakṣmaṇa's and Kausalyā's speeches, each seemingly based on different aspects of what they conceive to be *dharma,* constitute the *pūrvapakṣa.* Rāma's reply in verses 2.18.25–31 forms the *siddhānta.* Vālmīki, before giving Rāma's reply, refers to him as righteous and his reply as consistent with *dharma.*[217] Rāma does not deny the dhārmik aspects of Kausalyā's and Lakṣmaṇa's arguments, but says he sticks to a higher dharma. He says that Daśaratha's "command" was based on righteousness and one must not disobey one's father. He tells Lakṣmaṇa: "Give up your vile notions based on mere Kṣatriyadharma; follow [true] dharma" (2.18.36: *tad enāṃ visr*ja anā*ryaṃ kṣatradharmāśrītaṃ matim* | *dharmam āśraya . . .* || *).* After giving Rāma's reply, the poet indicates that that alone is correct, for he says that Rāma through his reply taught Lakṣmaṇa *the proper view of things.*[218]

216 Kausalyā calls Kaikeyī's words '*adharmyaṃ vacaḥ*' (2.18.18) and tells Rāma: 2.18.19: *dharmajña yadi dharmiṣṭho dharmaṃ caritum icchasi* | śuśrūṣa māṃ ihasthas tvaṃ *cara dharmam anuttamam* || Note the force of the repeated phrase *dharma* in Kausalyā's speech and also in the poet's description of Rāma's reply (see the next note).

217 2.18.25: *uvāca rāmo dharmātmā vacanaṃ dharmasaṃhitam* ||

218 2.18.40: *athānujaṃ bhṛśam anuśāsya darśanam*

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§3.2 In debate (2) of § 1, Rāma's words 2.25.2–15 form the *pūrvapakṣa* and are preceded by Vālmīkī's repeated description of Rāma as one who cherished righteousness (2.24.19, 2.25.1: *dharmavatsālaḥ;* 2.25.1: *dharmajña*). To Sītā who wanted to accompany him to the forest Rāma said, "You must stay here and do your duty, not what your heart desires. You must do as I say," [219]... and he spoke to her of the hardships of life in the forests (2.25.4–14). Sītā's reply (*sarga* 26) constitutes the *'siddhānta'.* In her reply, Sītā argued that as his devoted and faithful wife, his sorrows and joy in the past as well as in the future are hers to share[220] and said to Rāma, "To be with you is heaven, to be without you is hell. Knowing this, agree to take me with you." [221] Rāma agreed, saying that he was only 'testing' Sītā, in order to fully know her feelings.[222] Other than saying that Rāma agreed to Sītā's request, Vālmīki does not specifically comment on Sītā's arguments in the debate. But the poet conveys, through the words of Anasūyā in a later *sarga*, that her arguments are the correct ones. In *Sarga* 109, Anasūyā praises Sītā for her righteousness in abandoning her relatives and wealth and following Rāma to the forest (2.109.21–22).

But of course, there was no need for Sītā to argue at length, for Rāma surely could read her mind and feelings. This is clear from Vālmīkī's statement earlier that the love that Rāma and Sītā felt for each other was so great that each could read the other's heart.[223] What we have here is only Vālmīki describing a scenario presenting two sides of a case, for the benefit of his *audience*. Vālmīki is also conveying the messages that (1) a husband and wife should share life's prosperity as well as adversity and (2) that, especially the husband, should not treat the wife like a piece of baggage and should not subject her to share any of his hardships without making sure that she fully desired to share in them.

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219 2.25.2–3: *ihācara svadharmaṃ tvaṃ mā yathā manasaḥ sukham || site yathā tvāṃ vakṣyāmi tathā kāryaṃ tvayā abale | vane doṣā hi bahavo vadatas tan nibodha me ||*

220 2.26.18: *bhaktāṃ pativratāṃ dīnāṃ māṃ sukhaduḥkhayoḥ | netum arhasi kākutstha samānasukhaduḥkhinīm ||*

221 2.27.17: *yas tvayā saha sa svargo nirayo yas tvayā vinā | iti jānan parāṃ prītiṃ gaccha rāma mayā saha ||*

222 2.27.26: *tava sarvam abhiprāyam avijñāya śubhānane | vāsaṃ na rocaye araṇye śaktimān api rakṣaṇe ||*

223 1.76.16: *tasyāś ca bhartā dviguṇaṃ hṛdaye parivartate | antarjātam api vyaktam ākhyāti hṛdayaṃ hṛdā ||*

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§3.3 In the debate (3) of §one, when Bharata met Rāma in Citrakūṭa, Rāma said he had made up his mind to spend 14 years in the forests. Bharata argues that Rāma must return to Ayodhyā; his arguments constitute the *pūrvapakṣa* and they are prefaced by Vālmīkī's words, "Righteous Bharata spoke these righteous and wonderful words"[224] and is followed by Bharata's reasoning that Rāma should return to Ayodhyā (2.98.41–68). Immediately after Rāma's speech, giving reasons for refusing Bharata's request, Vālmīki is careful to describe Rāma as "righteous Rāma", "who consoled Bharata".[225]

The examples discussed above give us a picture of Vālmīkī's didactic technique involved. The *seemingly* valid position, "the *pūrvapakṣa",* is given first (sometimes even preceded, and/or followed, by words of praise) and then the really correct or true position, "the *siddhānta.*"

§3.4 Let us now discuss the fourth debate, the Vālī–Rāma conversation. Vālmīki presents the accusation of Rāma by Vālī first, as the *pūrvapakṣa;* and then he presents Rāma's reply, as the *siddhānta.* Of course, on the surface of it, Vālī's speech seems to be reasonable and correct. Vālmīki does introduce it, calling Vālī's words "consistent with righteousness" (4.17.12: *dharmasaṃhitam*) and similarly again at the end of it (before presenting Rāma's speech) (4.18.1: *dharmārthasahitam*). That is how Vālmīki generally speaks of the *pūrvapakṣa* of any debate But then the poet immediately introduces Rāma's reply to Vālī — the *"siddhānta"* — as "unsurpassed words distinguished by righteousness and statecraft", and at the end of it refers to it as "Rāma's sweet, calm words strictly according to righteousness" and again as "well–reasoned words".[226]

224 2.98.40: *uvāca bharataś citraṃ dhārmiko dhārmikaṃ vacaḥ* ||

225 2.100.1: āśvāsayantaṃ bharatam jābāliḥ . . . | *uvāca rāmaṃ dharmajñaṃ . . .* ||

226 Vālmīki says of Vālī's words: 4.17.12: . . . *vālī . . .* | *abravīt praśritaṃ vākyaṃ paruṣaṃ dharmasaṃhitam* || 4.18.1: *ity uktaḥ praśritaṃ vākyaṃ dharmārthasahitaṃ hitam* | The poet praises Rāma's reply: 4.18.3: *dharmārthaguṇasaṃpannaṃ . . . anuttamam* | And again as 4.18.56: . . . *vākyaṃ madhuraṃ mahātmanaḥ samāhitaṃ dharmapathānuvartinaḥ* | and 4.19.1: *hetumad vākyaiḥ* . . . . Masson (1975: p. 676b–677a) cites only Vālmīki's remarks on the *pūrvapakṣa* and turns a blind eye to the poet's remarks on Rāma's reply, the *siddhānta*; so does R P Goldman (2004: p.35).

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§3.5 Let us now look at the fifth debate cited, the Rāma–Sītā conversation in the *agni–praveśa* episode. Rāma's words rejecting Sītā form the *pūrvapakṣa, "Your character has come under suspicion. A man of honour cannot take back a woman who had lived in another man's house for any period of time."* [227] Indeed, his words only convey what many ordinary (uncultured) people have felt over the centuries to be proper behaviour, namely that an abducted woman should not be taken back into the family; in the *U–K* story, Rāma himself was criticized by many in Ayodhyā for taking back Sītā even though her chastity had been proved by her *agni–praveśa.* Sītā's reply to Rāma constitutes the *siddhānta.* She said that only an uncultured person would condemn all because of the actions of a few and so it is wrong to reject a woman simply because she had spent some time in another man's custody (6.104.5, 7).

Since Sītā was proved to be right — not only was she unscathed by her *agni–praveśa,* but the Devas themselves praised her highly and chided Rāma, saying, "How can you act like an uncultured man and reject Sītā?" (96.105.8: *upekṣase ca vaidehīṃ mānuṣaḥ prākṛto yathā* ||). Thus a lesson was taught, namely, that, as Sītā had pointed out, *a woman should not be rejected simply because she had been abducted, and that one should not condemn a whole group for the actions of a few.*[228] In view of the Devas' praise of Sītā, there was no need for Vālmīki to comment explicitly on Sītā's words; but his message is clear from the repeated use of the word *prākṛta* (ordinary, uncultured) in Sītā's and the devas' description of Rāma's words.

Vālmīki condemns the *pūrvapakṣa* in one only one case: where Jābāli presented arguments clothed in philosophical garb (2.100.1; 2ff) that worldly wisdom requires that Rāma should return to Ayodhyā and take over the kingdom.

§4 Once we see the structure of these debates, we realize that it would be most inappropriate to come to conclusions on the basis of the

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227 Rāma said to Sītā: 6.103.19: *kaḥ pumān hi kule jātaḥ striyaṃ paragṛhoṣitām | tejasvī punar ādadyāt suhṛllekhena cetasā* ||

228 Sītā said to Rāma: 6.104.5,7: *rūkṣaṃ śrāvayase vīra prākṛtaḥ prākṛtām iva | pṛthakstrīṇāṃ pracāreṇa jātiṃ tvaṃ pariśaṅkase |*

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pūrvapakṣa alone simply because Vālmīki had some words in praise of it as he generally has for the *pūrvapakṣa* in every debate. To cite one example, Masson (1975, pp. 676b–677a) cites 4.18.1 and claims that it shows that Vālmīki himself had endorsed Vālī's statement; R P Goldman (2004, p. 35 and note 64) echoes Masson, citing both 4.17.12 and 4.18.1, but is careful to call Vālī's reproaches only "seemingly reasoned." But both critics have failed to observe Vālmīkī's didactic technique in presenting the *pūrvapakṣa* and the *siddhānta* of debates. They have turned a blind eye to verse 4.18.3 where Vālmīki introduces the "*siddhānta*", describing Rāma's reply as couched in "unsurpassed words distinguished by righteousness and statecraft" as well as to Vālmīkī's statement at the end of Rāma's speech that Vālī "[now] saw things clearly" (4.18.52), as also to Vālmīkī's statements referring to Rāma's speech as "the sweet, calm speech of great Rāma, who followed the path of *righteousness*" (4.18.56) and that Vālī had been "answered with well-reasoned words' (4.19.1).[229]

229 Masson (1975) repeatedly refers to passages that the Critical Edition has rejected as spurious; and he ignores evidence that contradicts his assertions; further, the paper is riddled with muddling of names and other howlers and errors. The depth of bias and the shallowness of understanding of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa that Masson's paper reveals are seen, in particular, in its reference to Rāma's reply to Vālī. Vālmīki describes Rāma's reply as the 'sweet and calm speech of righteous Rāma' and as 'well-reasoned words'. Masson calls Rāma's reply "remarkably crude and distasteful arguments" (p. 675 b).

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6
Rāma's love for Sītā

Some Indian and western critics have said that Rāma's male friends and relatives were in fact dearer to him than even his wife Sītā was. We shall first consider their arguments as the *pūrvapakṣa,* and then show that none was as dear to Rāma as Sītā.

§1.1 We start with two verses describing Rāma's sorrow over Jaṭāyu's death. When searching for the abducted Sītā, Rāma comes across the vulture–king Jatāyu who has been killed in a vain attempt to rescue the princess; he is profoundly moved and says to Lakṣmaṇa:

> [J]: *sītāharaṇajaṃ duḥkhaṃ na me saumya tathāgatam* |
> *yathā vināśo gṛdhrasya matkṛte ca paraṃtapa* || (3.64.25)

(*"Dear [brother], slayer of enemies, my sorrow over Sītā's abduction has not been so hard to bear as the death of the vulture in my cause."*[230]) That is, Rāma says that the abduction of Sītā does not cause him as much anguish as the death of the bird Jaṭāyu for his sake.

Do Rāma's words mean that he puts a higher emotional valuation upon a bird that he has only met once, than upon his own beloved wife, as appears to be confirmed by the very next verse where Rāma equates Jaṭāyu with Daśaratha, the vulture's old friend?

[B]: Rāma says, «*I must render the same reverence and veneration to this lord of birds as I would owe the majestic king Daśaratha of great renown."* (3.64.26)

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230 The translation [J] is by Pollock (*RV* vol. 3); [B] is 3.64.26: *rājā daśarathaḥ śrīmān yathā mama mahāyaśaḥ* | *pūjanīyaś ca mānyaś ca tathāyaṃ patageśvaraḥ* ||

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Does the equation of Daśaratha and Jaṭāyu, taken with statement [J] lead to the conclusion that it is an instance of where Rāma downgrades Sītā in favour of his male relatives?[231]

§1.2 For a proper understanding of Rāma's statements cited above, one must take into consideration the context in which they were uttered.

When earlier, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, accompanied by Sītā, first came upon a huge vulture in the forest, they asked him who he was. In a pleasing and gentle voice, the bird, Jaṭāyu, replied: "My dear son [*vatsa*], know me to be your father's friend and companion *[vayasya]* "(3.13.3: *"vatsa! māṃ* viddhi vayasyaṃ pitur *ātmanaḥ"*). The use of the word *vayasya* by Jaṭāyu shows that he was Daśaratha's friend and comrade and nearly of the same age as Daśaratha; Jaṭāyu tells Rāvaṇa that he is 60,000 years old.[232] Rāma recalled that his father, Daśaratha, had spoken many, many times about his close friend Jaṭāyu.[233] Before they parted, Jaṭāyu again repeatedly and affectionately addressed Rāma as "*tāta!*", as one would address a dear son. Rāma must have recalled, too, that only his father Daśaratha and mother Kausalyā had called him "*my dear son* " (2.4.16, 40: *putraka!;* 2.4.39: *vatsa!;* 2.17.24: tāta!), and here was his father's — his late father's — dear friend who addressed him again and again as "*my dear child,"* in endearing terms that a parent would use.[234] To meet one's father's close friend is like meeting one's absent father himself, and Rāma must have felt Jaṭāyu's presence as that of Daśaratha himself; not surprisingly he also addressed Jaṭāyu by the affectionate term "*tāta!* " that a son would use towards his father (3.64.7).

Only a little while before meeting with Jaṭāyu for the second time, Rāma had discovered that Sītā was missing from the hermitage, and, maddened by despair, sorrow and anger, he was ready to destroy the whole world.[235]

231 R P Goldman (1980: p. 161) claims that it does. It is shown here that it does not.

232 See Apte: Sanskrit Dictionary. In 3.48.19, Jaṭāyu says he is 60,000 years old. Daśaratha in 2.2.6 and his courtiers in 2.2.15 say he is "many thousands of years old."

233 3.13.35: *pitur hi śuśrāva sakhitvam ātmavān jaṭāyuṣā saṃkathitaṃ punaḥ punaḥ* ||

234 Jaṭāyu addressed him by the words *vatsa* or *tāta* in 3.13.3, 15, 34), and also in 3.64.7. Rāma also felt towards him as towards his own father.

235 See e.g. 3.60.52: *pureva me cārudatīṃ aninditāṃ diśanti sītāṃ yadi nādya maithilīm | sa-deva-gandharva-manuṣya-pannagaṃ jagat saśailaṃ parivartayāmy aham* ||

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Although Lakṣmaṇa had calmed him and rescued him from the depths of despair, he was yet consumed with great grief. Lakṣmaṇa, with his gentle and wise advice had made him extricate himself from the *depths* of grief and to concentrate instead on what should be done next,[236] namely, finding out who had abducted Sītā (3.61.12). He exhorted Rāma not to grieve like an 'ordinary' man (3.62.13: śocituṃ nārhase vīra yathānyaḥ prākṛtas tathā). Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa had then started to search the forest for Sītā.

It was then that they met with Jaṭāyu, wounded and near death, with blood gushing out of his mouth. Jaṭāyu told them that it was Rāvaṇa who had abducted Sītā and that he had been unable to prevent it even at the cost of his life. As Jaṭāyu lay dying, Rāma recalled the disasters that had been his fate — leaving Ayodhyā, leading a life of exile in the forest, the loss of Sītā, and as Rāma put it: "Now my father's close friend and companion lies on the ground, dying, because of my fate".[237] Blaming thus his own fate, Rāma hugged his late father's friend, with the affection of a son for his father.[238] For, in his father's friend who sacrificed his life for his sake, he saw his father himself, just as he saw his father in his brother Lakṣmaṇa, who abandoned all pleasures and accompanied him in his exile.[239] As Jaṭāyu lay dying, Rāma wanted him to tell him about Sītā, dear to him as his own life,[240] and asked him as to where her abductor Rāvaṇa lives, and so on.

In his short reply, Jaṭāyu assuages Rāma's grief at the loss of Sītā; he told him, "Sītā will be recovered soon, for Rāvaṇa had carried out the abduction at the hour called *vinda* and any loss that occurs in that hour will be recovered very soon. Do not agonize about Sītā; you will soon

236 3.61.12: *yena rājan hṛtā sītā tam anveṣitum arhasi* |

237 3.63.21–24; especially 3.63.21: *rājyād bhraṃśo vane vāsaḥ sītā naṣṭā hato dvijaḥ* | īdṛśīyaṃ mamālakṣmīr nirdahed api pāvakam || and 3.63.24: *ayaṃ pitṛvayasyo me gṛdhrarājo jarānvitaḥ* | śete vinihato bhūmau mama bhāgyaviparyayāt ||

238 3.63.25: *jaṭāyuṣaṃ ca pasparśa pitṛsnehaṃ nidarśayan* ||

239 Sītā tells Hanumān when he met her in Laṅkā, that whenever Rāma saw Lakṣmaṇa; he would cease to grieve over his father. (5.36.49: *yaṃ dṛṣṭvā rāghavo naiva vṛddham āryam anusmarat*).

240 3.63.26: [Rāma asked Jaṭāyu]: *kva maithilī prāṇasamā mama . . .* ||

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be happily reunited with her".[241] Rāma must naturally have been deeply moved that the aged Jaṭāyu – his father's friend and companion, and of the same age as his father — went to the aid of Sītā, fought against the mighty Rāvaṇa, and that the king of the vultures sacrificed his life in trying to be of service to Rāma.[242]

Just before meeting the wounded Jaṭāyu, Rāma had somewhat regained his composure and the control of his emotions after Sītā's disappearance. He would have felt encouraged further by Jaṭāyu's statement that he would soon be happily reunited with Sītā. Jaṭāyu, his father's friend and companion, who had affectionately addressed him repeatedly as "My dear son!" died sacrificing his life in his service. Rāma, on his part, felt filial affection for Jaṭāyu (see note 242) and addressed him as '*tāta!*' (As a child would address the father or someone who has the same status, here '*dear uncle*' is apt) (3.64.7). And Rāma lamented repeatedly that all the misfortunes that had befallen him, including the death of Jaṭāyu, were all due to his bad luck/fate.[243] Emotions must have crowded in on Rāma. His father's friend's death would have taken Rāma's mind to thoughts about the death of his own father Daśaratha — how he died with none of his sons at his side. In particular, it had been Rāma's great anguish, and he felt very wretched, that he — his father's eldest son — had not even been able to perform the funeral rites for his father.[244] He had felt miserable in his heart that he had done nothing for his father — not even the final rites — and there was nothing he could do now, after his father's death while he himself was an exile in the forest.

Therefore, seeing that Jaṭāyu had sacrificed his life by trying in vain to prevent Rāvaṇa from carrying away Sītā, the daughter–in–law of his dear friend Daśaratha, Rāma felt, with perfect reason, that he must

241 3.64.12–14: *yena yāti muhūrtena sītām ādāya rāvaṇaḥ | vipranaṣṭaṃ dhanaṃ kṣipraṃ tatsvāmī pratipadyate || vindo nāma muhūrto 'sau sa ca kākutstha nābudhat | . . . || . . . vaidehyā raṃsyase kṣipraṃ hatvā taṃ rākṣasaṃ raṇe ||*

242 3.64.23: [Rāma says]: *mama hetor ayam prāṇān mumoca patageśvaraḥ ||*

243 See 3.63.24 quoted in Note 237 above.

244 2.95.13: Rāma bewails: *kiṃ nu tasya mayā kāryaṃ durjātena mahātmanaḥ | yo mṛto mama śokena na mayā cāpi saṃskṛtaḥ ||*

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honour his dead father's dead friend as he would honour his own father. It is in these circumstances that he said:

> [J]: "*The sorrow on account of Sītā's abduction does not cause [as much] anguish as the death of this vulture (Jaṭāyu) for my sake*" (3.64.25).

The statement does not compare the intensity of the sorrow that Rāma had felt *earlier* on account Sītā's disappearance on the one hand, and the sorrow that Rāma now felt at Jaṭāyu's death on the other. Recall that *earlier* he had been maddened by sorrow and extreme anger that Sītā had been abducted, or perhaps even devoured (3.60.35); in his anger, he was ready to destroy the whole world (3.60.52). Due to Lakṣmaṇa's gentle and wise counselling, Rāma had recovered his equanimity even by the time they met the wounded Jaṭāyu. When they met Jaṭāyu, Rāma would have been comforted further by Jaṭāyu's prediction[245] that he would soon be reunited with Sītā.[246]

In considering Rāma's statement we must bear in mind also that while there is always the possibility that an abducted person can be recovered, there is no possibility of bringing a dead person back to life. Also, Jaṭāyu had pointed out that Sītā was abducted during the period of the day called the *vinda muhūrta* and that any loss occurring in that *muhūrta* will be recovered soon (3.64.12–13); therefore, Rāma must have become confident of recovering Sītā. For, like other people and especially other characters in the Rāmayaṇa, Rāma too had faith in auspicious *muhūrtas*, and in omens etc. For instance, when requested to choose an auspicious *muhūrta* for the *vānara* army to begin crossing the ocean to Laṅkā, Rāma said: "*Let the crossing begin when the sun is at its zenith during the* muhūrta *'vijaya' [success]*" (6.4.3). (We should bear in mind that astrological and other omens have great value for the persons in the Rāmayaṇa, including Rāma, Daśaratha and Vālmīki too.[247])

245 See 3.64.12–14 quoted above.

246 The word *tathāgatam* in 3.64.25 may be taken in the present tense, or in the past tense.

247 See for instance: 2.2.10; 2.3.24, 2.4.21; 3.55.3–4; 3.55.18; 3.57.4; 3.58.1–2; 5.25.10–21; 5.25.35–37; 5.26.20; 5.27.3–6.; 6.4.3, 6.

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Therefore, Rāma's statement [J], uttered immediately after Jaṭāyu's reassuring words just before his death, does not mean that Rāma devalued his wife Sītā in favour of his father's friend.

Yet another way of looking at Rāma's statement is to view it as a form of a *na hi nindā* statement. In such a statement, of two things (or persons) X and Y, one of them, say X, is (usually) praised higher than the other, Y. The purpose is not to devalue Y in favour of X, but only to praise X, and *indeed, no actual comparison is intended.* Thus, the statement [J] means only that Rāma felt *intense* grief at Jaṭāyu's death.

We should note also that Rāma's great anguish at Sītā's abduction is described not only in *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, but also in the Kiṣkindhā–, Sundara– and *Yuddha– kāṇḍas* — that is, in each of the succeeding *kāṇḍas.* In contrast, Rāma hardly ever refers to Jaṭāyu, after *sarga* 64 of the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* where the quoted passage [J] occurs. This also shows that the claim that Rāma held his father's male friend Jatāyu dearer than his own wife Sītā is quite untenable.[248]

Finally, we should note that Rāma's manner of speaking always places his immediate audience — whoever is immediately before him (here, the dying Jaṭāyu) — above everything else in the world. Several instances of this are given in §§2–5 below.

§2 During the battle of Laṅkā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are stricken down by the mighty Indrajit; Rāma, regaining consciousness and thinking Lakṣmaṇa to be dead, laments:

> [L 1]: *kiṃ nu me sītayā kāryaṃ kiṃ kāryaṃ jīvitena vā* |
> śayānaṃ yo 'dya paśyāmi bhrātaraṃ yudhi ni*rjitam* ||
> śakyā sītāsamā nā*r*ī p*r*āptuṃ loke vicinvatā |
> *na lakṣmaṇasamo bhr*ātā sacivaḥ sāṃpa*r*āyikaḥ || (6.39.5–6)

That is, "*Of what use is Sītā now? Of what use is even my life when I see my brother fallen now, defeated in battle? Searching, I may be able to find in*

248 Thus we cannot agree with R P Goldman's (1980: p. 160) assessment that the statements [J] and [B] imply that Rāma devalued his wife Sītā in favour of his male relatives or friends.

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the world a woman equal to Sītā, but never a brother and valorous advisor the equal of Lakṣmaṇa." [249]

More than one critic has jumped to the conclusion on the basis of the above verse that Rāma downgraded Sītā in favour of his younger brother and constant companion Lakṣmaṇa.[250] However, let us examine the situation closely.

To any man who suddenly comes face to face with a calamitous event, be it the death of his father, or the abduction of his wife, or the sight of a brother who has been killed, the whole world would seem to collapse and life feels unbearable. When Rāma saw Lakṣmaṇa wounded and apparently dead, his whole world became a void except for Lakṣmaṇa who (he thought) lay dead. Grief for Lakṣmaṇa crowded out all his other feelings. He felt keen sorrow that his dear brother Lakṣmaṇa had died in assisting him in his war against Rāvaṇa for the recovery of Sītā. Even Sītā, even after she is rescued, cannot help to bring Lakṣmaṇa back to life, nor even to help Rāma face his mothers and his brothers Bharata and Śatrughna if he returned to Ayodhyā without Lakṣmaṇa (6.39.8–10). It was under these circumstances that Rāma lamented as in the statement [L 1].

249 V S S Śāstri ([1944] 1949/1979: pp. 25–28) cites these verses to make his claim that "Rāma declared in so many words that Sītā was not so high in his affection as Lakṣmaṇa" (p. 25). R P Goldman (1980: p. 161) also cites them and says: "In this instance Rāma values a figure who stands very much in the relation of a devoted son to him over the object of his sexual love." I do not agree with Goldman's conclusion, as well as with what may be implicit in his statement, namely the assumption that Sītā was to Rāma primarily "the object of his sexual love." The Rāmāyaṇa's concept of a wife is as a *sahadharmacarī, a partner (with the husband) in the practice of dharma.* Rāma did not bring Sītā with him to the forest in order that she may serve as the object of his "sexual love." When he finally gave in to Sītā's insistent request to be allowed to accompany him to the forest, Rāma said: "[Very well]. Come with me, and be my partner in the practice of *dharma*." The *Tait S* 6.1.8.5 says: *One's wife is half of oneself."* In the southern versions of the Rāmāyaṇa, Vasiṣṭha says: "the wife is the very self of the husband." Thus, the wife is primarily not an object of sexual love, but a *partner in life and in its duties.*
R P Goldman and S J Goldman (2009: *RV*6, p.46) also echo Sastri's conclusion.

250 See e.g. V S S Sastri ([1944] 1949/1979: pp. 25–28) and R P Goldman (1980: p.161).

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Note that Rāma's words in [L 1] above, even if taken literally and without regard for the context, do not really give a *comparative* evaluation of Sītā, who is described as a noble woman, and Lakṣmaṇa who is described as a brother and comrade–in–arms and military advisor. One cannot compare "apples and oranges." Rāma was not making a statement as to who is dearer to him. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa had been life–long friends and Lakṣmaṇa has been described as Rāma's soul in a different body. Rāma uttered the words under the impression that Lakṣmaṇa had been killed. Lakṣmaṇa's death would no doubt create a void in Rāma's life that [even] Sītā cannot fill. It is in that sense that we should understand Rāma's words "Of what use is Sītā of what use is even life?" etc.

Thus, we see that one cannot claim that [L 1] shows that Rāma devalued his wife Sītā in favour of his brother Lakṣmaṇa.

§3 Quite similar to the case discussed in §2 above is Rāma's lament on a second occasion, when he thought that Lakṣmaṇa had been killed by Rāvaṇa. Rāma lamented that neither victory in the war, nor even Sītā can fill the void created by Lakṣmaṇa's death. He says:

> [L 2]: "*Of what use is [this] war, or of my life or* Sītā, as I see my b*rother Lakṣmaṇa killed on the battlefield?*"[251] (6.89.7)

When Lakṣmaṇa was revived, Rāma told him:

> [L 3]: "*If you should be killed, of what use is my life, or [even] Sītā? Victory [in this war] would also be meaningless*"[252] (6.89.28).

After the discussion in §two, there is no need to discuss this again.

§4 We may mention here the verse [6.102.13] that is found in the Southern recension and is very popular in South India, but is rejected by the Critical Edition; it gives the words said to have been uttered by Rāma when he thought that Lakṣmaṇa had been killed:

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251 6.89.7: *na hi yuddhena me kāryaṃ naiva prāṇair na sītayā | bhrātaraṃ nihataṃ dṛṣṭvā lakṣmaṇaṃ raṇapāṃsuṣu* ||

252 6.89.28: *na hi me jīvitenārthaḥ sītayā ca jayena vā | ko hi me vijayenārthas tvayi pañcatvam āgate* || V S S Śāstri does not cite [L 3], but cites, [L1], [L 2] and [L 4].

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[L 4]: *deśe deśe kalatrāṇi deśe deśe ca bāndhavāḥ* |
taṃ tu deśaṃ tu na paśyāmi yatra bhrāta sahodaraḥ ||

That is, "*One may obtain wives and relatives in any country, but there is no country where one can obtain a brother.*" It is not surprising that South Indian critics writing several years before the Critical Edition was produced said that much as Rāma loved Sītā, he loved Lakṣmaṇa much more.

§5 We see that there is a kind of a pattern in speeches like this by Rāma where he is greatly afflicted by a calamity that had befallen someone for whom he has great affection. We consider below the example [L 3] together with [Su1] (which latter is found in certain recensions of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa). Before hostilities had really begun, Sugrīva perceived Rāvaṇa far away and immediately jumped and engaged in a bout with him. Rāma chides him for his impulsive action:

[Su 1]: Rāma tells Sugrīva, "*Don't act like this on impulse. If something happens to you, what is the use of Sītā to me? Or, of Bharata or Lakṣmaṇa? Or, of* Śat*rughna, or of my own body?*" [253]

Are we to take the above words of Rāma as indicating that he valued Sītā, Bharata and Lakṣmaṇa less than he did Sugrīva? Consider the circumstances in which Rāma uttered those words. Sugrīva had on his own, without consulting Rāma, sprang towards Rāvaṇa and had a short fight with him before returning to Rāma's presence. Rāma wanted to admonish Sugrīva, his general, for his impulsive action. He did so very diplomatically, disapproving of Sugrīva's action while at the same time making Sugrīva feel that he was a very important and dear person for Rāma. Rāma's words may also be viewed as an example of the *na hi nindā* idiom. We can see also in each of the examples [J], [L 1], [L 2], [L 3] and

253 CE 6.610*, lines 6–9 = [6.41.4–5]: *idānīṃ mā kṛthā vīra evaṃvidham arindhama* | *tvayi kiṃcit samāpanne kiṃ kāryaṃ sītayā mama* || *bharatena mahābāho lakṣmaṇena yavīyasā* | śatrughnena ca śatrughna svaśarīreṇa *vā punaḥ* || (I cite this passage even though it is not found in the CE proper. It is found in the very popular southern recension.)

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[Su 1] above, that *when Rāma talks to, or about, any friend or relative, he refers to that person as the most valued person in his life.*[254] This attitude is not peculiar to Rāma, but common among people in India.

Vālmīkian characters like Rāma and Daśaratha are not free from giving way to rhetoric in their speeches. The words used by them should not be taken literally; the speakers do not intend their audience to take their words literally — and the audience knows that the words should not be taken literally. Instances are when Rāma said to Kaikeyī, "My wealth, the kingship, Sītā and my dear life I would gladly give up to Bharata" (2.16.33: *ahaṃ hi sītāṃ rājyaṃ ca prāṇān iṣṭān dhanāni ca | hṛṣṭo bhrātre svayaṃ dadyāṃ bharatāyāpracoditaḥ* ||), and when Daśaratha said to Kaikeyī, "Is there some guilty man who should be freed, or some innocent man I should execute?" (2.10.10). It is only those who do not understand that these are rhetorically uttered words would take them literally.[255]

§6 Indeed, certain statements, when taken literally, can be quite misleading. For instance, Sītā tells Hanumān in the course of a fairly long conversation (spanning eight *sargas*) with him:

[Sītā 1]: "*Lakṣmaṇa [is/was] always dearer to Rāma than [even] I.*"[256]

254 R P Goldman (1980: p. 162) says that the *U–K* also shows that Rāma valued his male relatives more than he did Sītā. This is not dealt with in the body of the present chapter since I do not consider the *U–K* to be really a part of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa. Goldman says: ". . . [Rāma's] decision to give up his wife is couched in terms of relative valuation in which she is shown clearly to be ranked below the hero's male relatives. He tells his brothers: 'Frightened with the fear of slander, I would give up my life, or even you, o bulls among men. How much more readily would I abandon Janaka's daughter" (7.44.13: *apy ahaṃ jīvitam jahyāṃ yuṣmān vā puruṣarṣabhāḥ | apavāda–bhayād bhītaḥ kiṃ punar janakātmajām* || *)*. But Rāma's words should not be taken as a comparative evaluation of his brothers on the one hand and his wife Sītā on the other. In the instance in question, Rāma was talking to his brothers, and his *manner of speaking* always places his audience, or whoever is immediately before him, above everything else in the world. This was seen in the discussion of [J], [Su 1], [L 1], [L 2}, [L 3] and other verses.

255 Pollock errs by taking the words literally. See Pollock (1986: *RV* vol. 2, pp. 58–59) where he goes on to claim that Daśaratha was suffering from unmastered sexual desire and calamitous passion.

256 5.36.48: [Sītā tells Hanumān]: *mattaḥ priyataro nityaṃ bhrātā rāmasya lakṣmaṇaḥ |*

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Superficially, this verse[257] appears to be stunning proof that Rāma devalued Sītā in favour of his brother Lakṣmaṇa. But Sītā's statement [Sītā 1] is really an instance of a form of the *na hi nindā* idiom; its purpose is to praise Lakṣmaṇa, and *no actual comparison is intended.* The statement [Sītā 1] was made by Sītā as a small part of a long praise of Lakṣmaṇa to Hanumān; it was not a discussion of as to whether Sītā or Lakṣmaṇa was dearer to Rāma. The statement is merely the strongest form in which Sītā could convey that Lakṣmaṇa was very dear to Rāma. (We must note also that only a minute earlier, Hanumān had said that Rāma had grown averse to everything because of his agonizing grief at Sītā's absence.) There is no doubt whatsoever that Sītā was the_most precious and dearest person for Rāma; just a little earlier during the same conversation, Sītā had already told Hanumān as much with unmistakable clarity, as we see below.

[Sītā 2]: Sītā told Hanumān: *"No one is dearer to him [Rāma] than I, or even as dear --- not [even] his mother, father or anyone else."* [258]

This is a clear statement of comparison! And it is not merely, what Sītā fondly imagines her status to be. For, Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa that he does not care to live even for an hour without Sītā [259] whom he repeatedly describes as being as dear to him as his own breath (3.63.26: *prāṇasamā*), or even dearer (3.56.6: *prāṇaiḥ priyatarā*); (3.59.24: *prāṇebhyo 'pi garīyasī*)

Vālmīki confirms that the literal interpretation of Sītā's statement [Sītā 2] is correct, for he also speaks of Sītā as being *"dearer to Rāma than life itself"* (4.26.6: *prāṇebhyo 'pi garīyasī*). And we know that what the poet says is more important than what anyone else says.

257 Cited by V S S Śāstri ([1944] 1977: p. 27) as "proof" that Rāma loved Lakṣmaṇa more than he loved Sītā.

258 5.34.29: [Sītā said:] *"na cāsya mātā na pitā na cānyaḥ snehād viśiṣṭo 'sti mayā samo vā* |

259 Rāma says: 3.56.4: yāṃ vinā notsahe vīra muhūrtam api jīvitum |

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We note also that Rāma was driven to near madness when, returning to the āśram after killing Mārīca, he could not find Sītā; but neither the death of his father, nor that of Jaṭāyu, nor the (mistaken) thought that Lakṣmaṇa had been killed in battle drove him to near madness.[260] There is absolutely no justification for the claim made by some that Rāma valued his male friends/relatives more than he did Sītā.

260 Some persons criticize Rāma for his words rejecting Sītā immediately after the Laṅkā war, words that led to her agni-praveśa, as well as for the story of her abandonment that occurs in the (so-called) *Uttarakāṇḍa*. These topics are dealt with in the chapters on "agni-praveśa" and "Uttarakāṇḍa".

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Appendix

Uttara-kāṇḍa, the pretender kāṇḍa

1. *Introduction*

§1 The *Uttara-kāṇḍa* (abbr.: U-K), which claims to be Vālmīkī's narration of the story of Rāma after his consecration as King of Ayodhyā, is generally presented in complete editions of the Rāmāyaṇa as though it is the seventh *kāṇḍa* of the Rāmāyaṇa. However, for over a century scholars are generally agreed that most if not all of the *U-K* is a later addition tacked on to Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa (Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa).[261] This essay takes a fresh look at the *U-K* and its status.

2. *Some preliminary remarks*

§2.1 *Sarga* 1 of the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the Rāmāyaṇa gives a very rough outline of the story to be developed later. It makes no reference to the *U-K* or to anything in it. *Sarga* 3 gives an outline of the story of Rāma as visualized by Vālmīki. The *U-K*, or a part of it, is referred to in verses 1.3.28 and 1.4.2; the phrase *uttare kāvye* in 1.3.29 seems to refer to a distinct *kāvya* or perhaps merely means "in the excellent poem"; but these verses are probably much later additions.

There are *phalaśruti* ślokas at the end of the Yuddha-kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa itself. Since *phalaśruti* ślokas will occur only at the end of a work, this means that the Rāmāyaṇa ended with the *Yuddha-kāṇḍa*. People who want to consider the *U-K* as a part of the Rāmāyaṇa claim, without real evidence to support such claim, that the above *phalaśruti*

261 See for instance R P Goldman: 1984, *RV* 1, p.15.

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ślokas of the Rāmāyaṇa are interpolations. The Critical Edition relegates the *phalaśruti* verses of both the Rāmāyaṇa and the *U–K* to the appendix. But it will be shown further below that even in ancient days many felt that the *U–K* was not really a part of Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa.

§2.3 The author of the *U–K* repeatedly refers to Vālmīki as a great and eminent sage. Since it is most unlikely that Vālmīki would have praised himself in these terms, this also suggests that he was not the author of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The *U–K* further refers to the '*rāmāyaṇa kāvya*" as an already completed work; this too suggests that the *U–K* itself did not consider itself to be part of the Rāmāyaṇa.[262]

3. *A preliminary comparison of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Uttarakāṇḍa*

§3.1 Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa is superbly planned and is executed with great poetic skill. The *U–K* lacks the poetic quality, dignity, unity and high moral standpoint that one finds in the Rāmāyaṇa proper. The concepts, plan and execution of the *U–K* are all poor, and the text is a hodge–podge of purāṇa–like stories.

§3.2 Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa says that Brahmā asked Vālmīki to compose "the story of Rāma" (Rāma–kathā) as a poem;[263] it also describes itself as "the great story of Sītā, and of the killing of Rāvaṇa".[264] Indeed the Rāmāyaṇa is really the story of Rāma and Sītā and there is practically nothing in it that does not contribute to their story. On the other hand, sixty–nine out of the hundred Sargas of the *U–K* have nothing to do with Rāma or Sītā.

§3.3 It seems to be that today only a few scholars — and some politicians, feminists, social reformers and people who wish to indulge in Rāma–bashing — that seem to consider the *U–K* to be a part of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa. Scholarly opinion holds that not only is the *U–K* a

262 (i) The *U–K* describes Vālmīki as *mahāmuni* and *munipuṅgava* several times; see e.g. U–K 48.7, 84.1, 86.4, 7 and elsewhere too. (ii) See U–K 84.3: *kṛtsnaṃ rāmāyaṇaṃ kāvyaṃ gāyatāṃ parayā mudā.*

263 1.2.34–36 uses the terms "*rāmakathā*", "*rāmāyaṇakathā*" and "*rāmasya kathā*".

264 1.4.6: *kāvyaṃ rāmāyaṇaṃ kṛtsnaṃ sītāyāś caritaṃ mahat | paulastyavadham ity eva cakāra caritavrataḥ ||.*

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later addition to the Rāmayaṇa, but also that by the time it was added, the Rāmayaṇa was already recognized as an exemplary work, and Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā as ideal models for human behaviour.

§3.4 However, although right from the beginning the *U–K* seems to have been considered to be *distinct* from Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa, it got to be viewed by many that the two texts are inseparable, and the *U–K* is included in many of the printed texts of the Rāmāyaṇa. But, traditionally, the *U–K* has generally been ignored. (See §§18–20 below.)

4. *The societal values of the Uttarakāṇḍa*

§4.1 The *U–K* adopts (and indirectly advocates) certain societal values in regard to the position of women and Śūdras in society. But its stance is in direct opposition to that of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa and is further evidence that the *U–K* is not a part of the genuine Rāmāyaṇa; indeed, it shows that the *U–K* is not by Vālmīki, the author of the Rāmāyaṇa. Since Rāma was revered as a *dharmātmā*, his ideas seen in the Rāmāyaṇa proper cannot be replaced by new ideas as to what *dharma* is, except by claiming that he himself adopted those new ideas.[265] That is what the *U–K* does. It embodies the new ideas in two stories that are usually referred to as *Sītā–parityāga*, the abandonment of Sītā (after Rāma and Sītā return to Ayodhyā and Rāma was consecrated as king) and Śambūka–*vadha*, the killing of the ascetic Śambūka. The *U–K* attributes both actions to Rāma, whom people acknowledged to be righteous and as a model to follow. By masquerading as an *additional kāṇḍa* of the Rāmāyaṇa composed by Vālmīki himself, the *U–K* succeeded, to a considerable extent, in sabotaging the values presented in Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa. This will be discussed in detail further below.

§4.2 The heart of the *U–K* consists of the two episodes mentioned above, and it is these episodes that have captured the interest of various poets, playwrights, scholars, politicians, feminists and social reformers alike. We shall first give the two episodes in brief.

265 For as R P Goldman (1984: *RV*, vol. 1, p.42.) says, by the time of the addition of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the text of Rāma's story had taken on "a fully defined function as an exemplary tale" with Rāma as "a model for human behaviour."

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I. *The U-K story of Sītā's exile*

§5.1 The *U-K* says that soon after Rāma's return from Laṅkā and his coronation, he heard that there was widespread dissatisfaction among the people of Ayodhyā that he had taken back Sītā who, according to the norms of the society, should be rejected since she had spent almost a year in Rāvaṇa's custody. Rāma was perturbed by the report and was plunged into sadness. *Afraid of earning a bad reputation among his people,* he decided that Sītā, who was pregnant (with twins) at that time should be exiled. *Warning his brothers against raising any protest,*[266] he ordered Lakṣmaṇa to take Sītā across the Ganga and leave her there, beyond the borders of his kingdom, near Vālmīkī's hermitage.[267] Sītā was not aware of any of this till Lakṣmaṇa took her across the Ganga and told her of Rāma's decision. (A point that is missed by many is that Rāma ordered Lakṣmaṇa to leave Sītā near the hermitage of Vālmīki, where Sītā would certainly be spotted very soon by Vālmīki or by his disciples; and when Lakṣmaṇa left her there, he informed her that Vālmīki was a very dear friend of Daśaratha, and that she could live in comfort under his care.[268] The *U-K* says that near Vālmīkī's hermitage itself there were also several other hermitages, with Rishis, their wives, disciples and children;[269] the area was not a forest with wild tigers or Rākṣasas.[270] Vālmīki told Sītā to feel quite at home staying in the care of the ascetic women who lived close to his āśram and who will look after her as their own child.[271] The *U-K* says also that Lakṣmaṇa remained in his chariot, on the Ayodhyā-

266 U-K 44.18: *na cāsmi prativaktavyaḥ sītāṃ prati kathañcana* |

267 U-K 44.16-17: Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa: *gaṅgāyās tu pare pāre vālmīkeḥ sumahātmanaḥ* | āśramo . . . || *tatraināṃ vijane kakṣe visṛjya raghunandana* |

268 U-K 46.16: *rājño daśarathasyaiṣa pitur me munipuṅgavaḥ* | *sakhā paramako vipro* vālmīkiḥ sumahāyaśāḥ ||

269 U-K 46.15 refers to the area as *brahmarṣīṇāṃ* ***tapovanam;*** U-K 48.1-2 speak of "sons of rishis: *munidārakāḥ* and *muniputrāḥ.* U-K 48.11 speaks of nearby āśrams.

270 Many mistakenly think that the hermitage was in a grim forest full of dangerous animals and perhaps even rākṣasas. As stated in the previous note, it is a *tapovana,* that is, a *meditation grove,* where ascetics practised austerities. (The word *vana* can mean a *garden,* or a *grove,* or a *forest*; however, the proper word for a dense forest is *araṇya.* Rāvaṇa kept Sītā imprisoned in his *Aśoka-vana* that he used also as his *pramadā-vana* (pleasure-garden) for dallying with his women.)

271 U-K.48.11-12: Vālmīki tells Sītā: āśramasyāvidūre me tāpasyas tapasi sthitāḥ | *tās tvāṃ vatse yathā vatsaṃ pālayiṣyanti nityaśaḥ* || . . . | *yathā svagṛhaṃ abhyetya viṣādaṃ caiva mā kṛthāḥ* ||

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side of the river, and left for Ayodhyā only after he saw Vālmīki lead her into his hermitage.[272] This also shows that Vālmīkī's āśram was not in a forest or heavily wooded area,[273] and that the abandonment of Sītā, cruel as it was, was arranged with a lot of concern for her safety and physical comfort.)

II. The Śambūka story in the *Uttara-Kāṇḍa*

§5.2 The major portion of the *U-K* has nothing to do with Rāma or Sītā. The only significant chapters of the *U-K* are devoted to the story of *Sītā-parityāga* (discussed above) and to the Śambūka story. The Śambūka story says that an aged Brahmin brought the dead body of his very young son to Rāma's presence and complained that the death of a young boy had happened in Rāma's kingdom only because of some grievous misconduct on Rāma's part (U-K 64.9: *r*āmasya duṣkṛtaṃ kiṃcin mahad

272 (i) U-K 49.1: *dṛṣṭvā tu maithilīṃ sītām āśramaṃ saṃpraveśitām.* (ii) See U-K 46.16-17. (iii) The paragraph in the text shows that the *U-K* story has been greatly distorted in the Assamese *Uttara-kāṇḍa* generally attributed to Śaṅkaradeva; (however, it is doubtful whether it was really written by Śaṅkaradeva; see p.588 of Biswanarayan Shastri: *Rāmāyaṇa in Assamese literature* in V Raghavan (ed.): *The Rāmāyaṇa tradition in Asia* (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi 1981)). W L Smith assumes that Vālmīki is the author of the Sanskrit *U-K* and he is also emphatic that Śaṅkaradeva's Uttara-kāṇḍa is based on the Sanskrit Uttara-Kāṇḍa (W L Smith: Wrath of Sītā, *J Vaishnava Studies* 4 (1994), p.7). But Śankaradeva's version is an *extreme* distortion of the Sanskrit *U-K* story, as can be seen from what is stated above in the text, contrasted with the following summary and comments by W L Smith on the Assamese version: "*Sītā is shocked to realize that her husband has commanded that she be left to die in the forest. This is a point that Śaṅkaradeva stresses. Sītā has not simply been exiled to the forest (banabāsa), but abandoned there to perish. Rāma has not simply repudiated her; he has tried to murder her.*" (W L Smith, *ibid.*, p. 8.) Smith goes on to say that, it is not an exaggeration to say that Rāma tried to murder Sītā, since he ordered Sītā to be abandoned in the "jungle", a dangerous wilderness filled with wild beasts and savages. But, in reality, the Sanskrit *U-K* shows that Sītā was not left in a jungle and there was no more danger to Sītā's life than if she had been sent to her father Janaka's house. Smith's comments that "in the Sanskrit [*Uttara-kāṇḍa*], Rāma tells Lakṣmaṇa to leave Sītā near the āśram of Vālmīki. He remains however, unaware of her fate" is hardly tenable in view of U-K 49.1 cited in the text. Lakṣmaṇa saw Vālmīki take her to an āśram (U-K 49.1). (iv) Also, Smith seems to mistake Bhavabhūti for Vālmīki. The statements he ascribes, on pp. 5-6 of his article, to what he calls "Vālmīki's *Uttara-kāṇḍa*" are not found anywhere in the Sanskrit *Uttara-kāṇḍa*; they seem to be derived from verses 1.5-6 of Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*. His statements on p.7 that Śaṅkaradeva "bases his *Uttara-kāṇḍa* on Vālmīki's original" and that "unlike his peers, [he] apparently depends on Vālmīki and Vālmīki alone" are also incorrect.

273 The decision to abandon Sītā was cruel, but it was carried out with compassion for her in that she was not simply "abandoned in the wilderness".

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asti na saṃśayaḥ |). Rāma consulted his ministers Vasiṣṭa, Mārkaṇḍeya, Maudgalya, Vāmadeva, Kāśyapa, Kātyāyana, Jābāli, Gautama and Nārada who advised him that the Brahmin boy's death happened because some Śūdra was performing *tapas* somewhere,[274] and that Rāma should take action against him. According to the *Uttara-kāṇḍa*, Rāma went in his aerial car searching all over his kingdom for the Śūdra; in the course of his search he came upon a person performing *tapas*; Rāma asked him what his *varṇa* was, and he identified himself as born of a Śūdra mother and that his name was Śambūka.[275] The *U-K* says that Rāma then cut off the Śūdra's head and that as already predicted by Rāma's advisors, the Brahmin boy in far-away Ayodhyā immediately came back to life![276]

But Rāma's killing of Śambūka is inconsistent with the portrayal of Rāma in the Rāmāyaṇa. (See §9.1 below.)

§6.0 As we look more closely at the *U-K* episode of Sītā's exile, we shall see that there are a number of reasons for deciding that this *U-K* story is also not a creation of Vālmīki and that it is not a part of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa.

§6.1.1 The *U-K* story says that soon after Rāma's coronation there was *widespread* dissatisfaction in Ayodhyā that Rāma had accepted Sītā who had been in Rāvaṇa's custody for many months. But this contradicts what is said in the Rāmāyaṇa about how happy and contented the people were under Rāma's rule, with no famine or premature death, for thousands of years following his coronation.[277] This strongly suggests that the story in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, and perhaps the *U-K* itself, is not by Vālmīki and is not really a part of the Rāmāyaṇa.

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274 U-K 65.23: śūdras tapyati durbuddhis tena bālavadho hy ayam ||

275 Paula Richman: "Why can't a Śūdra perform asceticism? Śambūka in three modern South Indian plays" (pp.125-148) *in* Mandakranta Bose (ed.): *The Rāmāyaṇa Revisited* (O.U.P. [Oxford] 2004), says, erroneously, that the "*U-K* attributed to Vālmīki" says that Rāma's ministers identified that "a Śūdra named Śambūka has been practicing *tapas.* "

276 *U-K* 67.5: *tasmin muhūrte bālo 'sau jīvena samayujyata* ||

277 See 1.1.71-72: *prahṛṣṭamudito lokas tuṣṭaḥ puṣṭaḥ sudhārmikaḥ* |... *na putramaraṇam kecid drakṣyanti puruṣāḥ kvacit* | 6.116.85: *na ca sma vṛddhā bālānāṃ pretakāryāṇi kurvate* |

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§6.1.2 Consider the *agni–praveśa* episode occurring in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. If it was to prove to the Rākṣasas, the monkeys and the bears assembled in Laṅkā that Sītā was chaste, the *agni–praveśa* was totally unnecessary. Hanumān's testimony was already known to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the monkeys and bears in Rāma's army. There were other witnesses too who could attest to her purity: Vibhīṣaṇa and his wife Saramā, their daughters Kalā and Analā , Rāvaṇa's own wife Manḍodarī, as well as Trijaṭā and any number of other rākṣasis who were guarding Sītā in the aśoka grove; even Sītā's appearance as she was — if she had been brought to Rāma's presence straight from the *Aśoka–vana* where she had been held captive — in her pitiable appearance, unbathed, unkempt, wearing a dusty soiled raiment and no ornaments,[278] would have been evidence that she had not been living in luxury in Rāvaṇa's palace. Therefore, the question as to why Rāma spoke those harsh words that led to Sītā's agni–praveśa requires proper consideration.

One explanation for Rāma's words is that he must have wanted the "world at large", including the 'ordinary', uncultured men ("*prākṛtāḥ*") also to be convinced of Sītā's purity. A second explanation is that Rāma's harsh words form the *pūrva–pakṣa* and Sītā's reply the *siddhānta* of the debate on whether a woman who had, due to whatever circumstances, spent a period in another man's house should be taken back or not. These matters will be discussed elsewhere. But anyway, Sītā's agni–praveśa, witnessed by Lakṣmaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa, Sugrīva, Hanumān, Aṅgada, Jāmbavān and large numbers of monkeys and bears, as well as by the Devas, would certainly achieve the purpose of convincing the people of Ayodhyā of Sītā's purity when, as one may suppose, these witnesses tell the people of Ayodhyā and elsewhere of the happenings in Laṅkā. Rāma certainly had looked upon Sītā's *agni–praveśa* as squelching the possibility of *any doubt anybody anywhere* may have about Sītā's chastity.[279] We may therefore expect that Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān and others, if not Rāma himself, would have made the *agni–praveśa* of Sītā public knowledge.

278 See Hanumān's description of Sītā in captivity in the Aśoka woods: e.g. U–K, ch.13.

279 See 6.106.13–14: Rāma says: *ananyahṛdayāṃ bhaktāṃ maccittaparirakṣiṇīm | aham apy avagacchāmi maithilīṃ janakātmajām || pratyayārthaṃ tu lok*ānāṃ trayāṇāṃ satyasaṃśrayaḥ | *upekṣe cāpi vaidehīṃ praviśantīṃ hutāśanam* ||

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Indeed, the *U–K* itself suggests that the people of Ayodhyā would have been told of what happened to Rāma and Sītā during their exile. For instance, the people knew that Sītā had been forcibly abducted by Rāvaṇa, and even the detail that she had been held in the *A*śoka woods.[280] It is beyond belief that they had been told that detail but not about the spectacular event of Sītā's *agni–praveśa* and how her purity had been attested to by the gods themselves. Note also that according to the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Hanumān and others who had been with Rāma in Laṅkā stayed on in Ayodhyā for *more than two months* after Rāma's coronation.[281] It is unbelievable that they would not have told the people of Sītā's *agni–praveśa* – especially in view of Rāma's declaration that the *agni–praveśa* in Laṅkā shall be a means to convince the people of the world of Sītā's purity.[282] They would have also told the people of Ayodhyā that after her *agni–praveśa*, Sītā not only emerged unscathed by the fire, but was showered high praise by the Devas and that *the Devas told Rāma that Sītā was absolutely pure and blameless, and asked him to take her back.*[283] It is therefore beyond belief that Vālmīki would say (as the *U–K* does) that there was *widespread* disapproval of Rāma's acceptance of Sītā. The *U–K* story is therefore highly suspect.

§6.1.3 We note that the *U–K does not, in fact, speak about any suspicion about Sītā's chastity in the mind of any person in Ayodhyā*. The *U–K* describes the people's feeling of dissatisfaction at *Rāma's action* as follows, "*Setting aside his anger, Rāma brought her back to his household. What kind of happiness does he feel by sexual union with her whom Rāvaṇa had forcibly carried her away, seating her in his lap? Why does he not reject her who was in the custody of the R*ākṣasa? [Because of Rāma's behavio*ur] we will also have to be forgiving towards our wives [who stay in another man's house for some days], [for] people follow the king's*

280 *U–K*, 42.18: *laṅkām api purnar nītām aśokavanikāṃ gatām | rakṣasāṃ vaśam āpannāṃ kathaṃ rāmo na kutsate* ||

281 See *U–K*, 38.17: *evaṃ teṣāṃ yayau māso dvitīyaḥ śaiśiraḥ sukham* |

282 See e.g. 6.106.14, quoted above.

283 6.106.9: Agni deva tells Rāma: *viśuddhabh*āvāṃ niṣpāpāṃ *pratigṛhṇīṣva rāghava*

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behaviour." [284] It is to be noted that the dissatisfaction expressed here is not in regard to *Sītā's character*, but in regard to *Rāma's action.*

The evidence contradicts the scholars who have said that according to the *U–K* there was widespread or "continuing" suspicion of Sītā's chastity; none of those scholars cite any evidence from the *Uttara–kāṇḍa*; some of them seem to have been confusing the later, fictional, play *Uttararāmacarita* of Bhavabhūti with the *Uttara–kāṇḍa.*[285]

§6.1.4 Sending Sītā into exile may have been perhaps justified by *Kṣatriyadharma*, but the Rāma of Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa had categorically renounced the *Kṣatriyadharma* ; he had described it as great *adharma (unrighteousness)* tinged with a little *dharma* (the *Kṣatriyadharma* of obeying the people's wishes). So why did the author of the *U–K* include the Sītā–parityāga story (and the Śambūka story) in his narration?

§7.1 The *U–K* story of the exile of Sītā seems to have been motivated to promote the ideas (1) that a woman who had been abducted and then rescued should not be welcomed back into the family, (2) that a husband may treat his wife in any manner he likes and that she should accept it meekly and without protest, and be totally subservient to her husband whom she should worship as her deity even if he treats her badly, and (3) that nobody has the right to criticize such action by the husband. This stand of the *U–K* is unfortunately shared by many in India even today. The intent of the Śambūka story seems to have been to establish that śūdras are not eligible to practise *tapas* (or other activities associated

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284 I have given in the text a translation of *U–K* 42.16–19 that read as follows: *amarṣaṃ pṛṣṭhataḥ kṛtvā svaveśma punar ānayat || kīdṛśaṃ hṛdaye tasya sītāsambhogajaṃ sukham | aṅkam āropya hi purā rāvaṇena balāddhṛtām || . . . rakṣasāṃ vaśam āpannāṃ kathaṃ rāmo na kutsate || asmākam api dāreṣu sahanīyaṃ bhaviṣyati | yathā hi kurute rājā prajā tam anuvartate ||*

285 See e.g. R P Goldman:1984, *RV* vol. 1, p.13; Paula Richman: *Introduction, p.7* in Paula Richman: *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (O.U.P., Delhi 1992); David Schulman: *Fire and Flood,* in *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (1992), p.89; R. Lefeber in *"The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki",* vol.4 (Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), p.45 note 152; W L Smith: *The wrath of Sītā: Śankaradeva's Uttarakāṇḍa*, pp. 5–6 in *J. Vaishnava Studies* vol. 12 no. 4, 1994; R P Goldman: *Resisting Rāma . . .* in *Rāmāyaṇa Revisited* (ed. M. Bose) (O.U.P. 2004), p. 39 for instance; also R P Goldman and S J Goldman in *'Rāmāyaṇa',* p. 82 in Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (eds.) *Hindu World* (Rutledge, 2004). None of them has cited anything in the *U–K* to support their position. Smith mistakes Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita* for the *Uttara–kāṇḍa.*

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with especially Brahmans). It was probably thought that the best way to present these right-wing reactionary ideas that are really contrary to the spirit of Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa, is to make them part of a text, name the text as a "later kāṇḍa" (of the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa) composed by Vālmīki himself, and then claim that it is 'a part of Vālmīki Rāmayaṇa'; for the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa had by that time been universally recognized as an exemplary text on *dharma*, and Rāma as the ideal exemplar of *dharma.* By such means, the messages implicit in Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa were subverted, and ideas contrary to those of the genuine Rāmāyaṇa were presented as though they were endorsed by Righteous Rāma himself; note that the *U-K* contains no episodes of real interest except for the exile of Sītā by Rāma and the killing of Śambūka by Rāma.

§7.2 For the "ordinary", common man the point at issue in the *U-K* episode was not Sītā's chastity but whether a man should take back his wife who had lived for some time — whether voluntarily or involuntarily — in another man's house. Such a woman's chastity is open to suspicion; in Laṅkā, Sītā's agni-praveśa proved her chastity. But she was not a mere human but goddess Lakṣmī herself, as the Devas declared. Therefore, simply because Sītā did an *agni-praveśa*, can it be prescribed that every married woman who had stayed for some time in another man's house should undergo an *agni-praveśa* test? No ordinary human being will survive the *agni-praveśa* test. Therefore, the ordinary men felt that a wife who had been abducted and who had lived in another man's house for some time should simply not be welcomed back into the family by her husband; and that this is the only way to ensure that no woman will go astray. This must have been the custom or law or norm even before Rāma's time. (And it is regrettable that many in India have followed this norm, through many centuries down to the present.) For it is this law that Rāma seemingly relied on when he uttered words rejecting Sītā just prior to her *agni-praveśa*, even though he knew that Sītā was pure.[286] Sītā protested against the Validity of that law[287] and proved it to be a defective law by her entry into and subsequent emergence from the fire.

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286 Rāma said harsh words to Sītā: 6.103.19: *kaḥ pumān hi kule jātaḥ striyaṃ paragṛhoṣitām | tejasvī punar ādadyāt suhṛllekhena cetasā ||*

287 6.104.5, 7: Sītā said to Rāma: *rūkṣaṃ śrāvayase vīra prākṛtaḥ prākṛtām iva || . . . | pṛthakstrīṇāṃ pracāreṇa jātiṃ tvam pariśaṅkase ||*

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§7.3 In the commoners' view, a king must obey and uphold the law, defined by the customs of the people; that is part of *rājadharma*. But Rāma's concept of dharma transcended not only Kṣatriyadharma but also rājadharma. So when Sītā's *agni-praveśa* proved her chastity of which he had had no doubt at any time, he took her back, thinking that the world would only approve of his action.

§7.4 But, especially from the point of view of the commoners of Ayodhyā, the issue was not Sītā's purity, but that Rāma had violated a time-honoured custom or law and in so doing had caused them difficulty in regulating their family affairs. That is really the substance of their grievance against Rāma and it put Rāma in a very difficult situation. The custom or law or social norm in question could be changed only with the consensus of the society; but Rāma had not consulted his subjects on whether he should take back Sītā. When Rāma suggested that Sītā should do another *agni-praveśa*, it was not because he had any doubts about Sītā's purity but in order to impress the thousands of his subjects of all *varṇas*, and many distinguished rishis and kings and monkeys and bears and rākṣasas as well, who had gathered there to witness Sītā's śapatha and agni-praveśa[288] — in order to vindicate his taking back Sītā. Indeed Vālmīki told Rāma, and the gathering, right at the beginning: "Sītā is pure . . . She was abandoned by you, *O great upholder of the law*, out of fear for your reputation." [289] Rāma then acknowledged to Vālmīki (and to the gathering) that he had always known that Sītā was pure, that he had made a bad mistake in sending Sītā away and he begged to be forgiven.[290] Apparently, he wanted the assembly to declare that it was a mistake to have sent Sītā away and that he should welcome her back.

§7.5 Sītā probably wanted to teach the common people that it was wrong to demand that anyone should undergo an *agni-praveśa* in order

288 See *U-K*, 87.1-7.

289 *U-K*, 87.14-15: Vālmīki said: *iyam dāśarathe sītā suvratā dharmacāriṇī | apāpā te parityaktā mamāśramasamīpataḥ || lokopavādabhītasya tava rāma mahāvrata | pratyayaṃ dāsyate sītā . . .* || I take the appropriate meaning of the word '*mahāvrata*' here to be '*great upholder of the law.*'

290 *U-K*, 88.3: *pratyayo hi purā datto vaidehyā surasannidhau | seyaṃ lokabhayād brahman apāpā ity abhijānatā | parityaktā mayā sītā tad bhavān kṣantum arhati* ||

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to prove one's purity; she probably wanted to teach the people that a woman, rescued from her abduction, should be welcomed back into the family. She swore, and proved her purity in an astonishing way. She did not do an *agni-praveśa*, but, on the strength of her purity, invoked Mother Earth and disappeared into the earth with her.

Characterization of Rāma

§8.0 The character of the Rāma of the *U-K* is strikingly inconsistent with that of the Rāma of Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa. The behaviour of the Rāma of the *U-K* is like that of Rāvaṇa, or even worse.

§8.1 It is true that people would not like to have a king whose wife's character was not above suspicion, for people would feel that such a king will be corrupted by having a corrupt wife; and they would also like their king to follow time-honoured customs and laws. The *U-K* says that Rāma decided to send Sītā into exile because he heard reports that there were *widespread* rumours among the people of Ayodhyā strongly disapproving of his taking back Sītā as his wife, although she had spent nearly a year in Rāvaṇa's custody. Rāma knew that Sītā was most chaste and pure and blemishless; he knew also that the people expressed no suspicion or complaint about Sītā or her character, but only about his action in taking her back. After sending Sītā into exile, Rāma continued to rule as king for several years.

But we know that the Rāma of the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa did not always feel obliged to act according to the people's wishes. To fulfil his father's promise to Kaikeyī, he was determined to go into exile. As he set out for the forest, the people pleaded with him, most pitifully, to return to Ayodhyā. But Rāma did not heed to their pleadings.[291]

§8.2 Some people argue that it is a king's *Kṣatriyadharma* requires not only that his queen should be above all suspicion, but also that the king should also uphold established customs and laws, and that it was for that reason that the Rāma of the *U-K* arranged for Sītā to be abandoned in the forest although he knew that she was absolutely pure and innocent — and

291 See: 2.40.11-29; 2.41.18, etc.

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pregnant at the same time. But such action by Rāma would be a typical instance of *Kṣatriyadharma* where righteousness and unrighteousness go hand in hand — and it is precisely this kind of *dharma* that the Rāma of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa had rejected. He had said, *more than once,* that his concept of *dharma* transcended the Kṣatriya code – a code that he rejected, describing it as a code "where unrighteousness and a little bit of righteousness go together, a code that is followed only by vile, greedy and wicked men of sinful deeds".[292]

§8.3 In acting according to the defective *Kṣatriyadharma* that had been resolutely rejected by the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, the Rāma of the *U–K* behaves very unlike the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa who had declared that it was not for earthly wealth that he cared to live in this world, and that, like a ṛṣi (Rishi), he cared only for *dharma,* righteousness.[293] The action of the Rāma of the *U–K* shows him to have been keen on enjoying the good opinion of his subjects and also on retaining the kingship; it shows him also as totally lacking any sense of justice or compassion: he did not even tell his pregnant wife that he was abandoning her, and why. Rāvaṇa too was proud of his kingship, wealth and glory and enjoyed the good opinion of his Rākṣasa subjects but had no sense of justice, nor any respect for women.[294] That is, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*'s portrayal of Rāma is rather like that of Rāvaṇa and is very unlike the portrayal of Rāma in Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa.

§8.4 The Rāma of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa never demanded that any one should accept his decisions meekly and unquestioningly. He was willing — indeed, he welcomed — dissent and debate. This can be seen from his discussions with Kausalyā and Lakṣmaṇa when they wanted him not

292 2.18.36: Rāma admonishes Lakṣmaṇa: *tad enāṃ visṛja anāryāṃ kṣatra–dharmāśritāṃ matim | dharmam āśraya mā taiksṇyaṃ mad buddhir anugamyatām* || Also, Rāma says in 2.101.20:*kṣātraṃ dharmam ahaṃ tyakṣye hy adharmaṃ dharmasaṃhitam | kṣudrair nṛśaṃsair lubdhaiś ca sevitaṃ pāpakarmabhiḥ* ||

293 2.16.46: *nāham arthaparo devi lokam āvastum utsahe | viddhi māṃ ṛṣibhis tulyaṃ vimalaṃ dharmam āśritam* ||

294 Rāvaṇa considered all women as merely sexual objects and indeed as fair prey to satisfy his lust: e.g. in 5.18.5 he tells Sītā: *svadharmo rakṣasāṃ bhīru sarvathaiṣa na samśayaḥ | gamanaṃ vā parastrīṇāṃ haraṇaṃ saṃpramathya vā* || The *U–K* has many episodes of Rāvaṇa's violation of women.

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to go exile, and also from his discussions with Sītā and with Lakṣmaṇa when they each wanted to accompany him to the forest. The behaviour of the Rāma of the *U–K* is in strong contrast: he sternly ordered his brothers from offering any discussion whatsoever on his decision to abandon Sītā in the *tapovana* beyond the borders of the kingdom.[295] We note that the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa had accepted with gratitude the advice that Lakṣmaṇa gave him from time to time, and praised it as excellent.[296] He had welcomed and praised the advice from Sugrīva also.[297] On the other hand, faced with a serious situation the Rāma of the *U–K* not only did not seek the advice of Lakṣmaṇa or any others, but sternly warned them against offering any comment. His behaviour is similar to that of Rāvaṇa who, driven by lust upon hearing Śūrpaṇakhā's description of Sītā, did not want to consult his ministers and advisors, but dismissed them and decided to abduct Sītā.[298] The warning Rāma issued to his brothers is similar to Rāvaṇa's scolding his uncle Mārīca for advising him against abducting Sītā, and similar to his admonition to Mārīca that he should speak only when asked and that even then he should not criticize his king.[299] Indeed, the behaviour of the Rāma of the *U–K* forbidding any comment from his brothers is much worse than that of Rāvaṇa who several times did allow Vibhīṣaṇa to advise him to return Sītā to Rāma, even though the advice was not to Rāvaṇa's liking. This was even before Hanumān returned from Laṅkā to Kiṣkindhā.[300] Even on

295 *U–K*, 44.18: Rāma told his brothers: *na cāsmi prativaktavyaḥ sītāṃ prati kathaṃcana | aprītiḥ paramā mahyaṃ bhavet tu prativārite* ||

296 See in particular 3.63.1, 3: *pūrvajo 'py uktamātras tu lakṣmaṇena subhāṣitam | sāragrāhī mahāsāraṃ pratijagrāha rāghavaḥ || kiṃ kariṣyāvahe vatsa kva vā gacchāva lakṣmaṇa | kenopāyena paśyāvaḥ sītām iti vicintaya* || 4.26.15–17: *lakṣmaṇasya tu tad vākyaṃ pratipūjya hitaṃ śubham | rāghavaḥ suhṛdaṃ snigdham idaṃ vacanam abravīt || vācyam yad anuraktena snigdhena ca hitena ca | satyavikramayuktena tad uktaṃ lakṣmaṇa tvayā || eṣa śokaḥ parityaktaḥ sarvakāryāvasādakaḥ | vikrameṣv apratihataṃ tejaḥ protsāhayāmy aham* ||

297 Comforted by Sugrīva's advice, Rāma thanked him and praised him. 4.7.17: *eṣa ca prakṛtistho 'ham anunītas tvayā sakhe | durlabho hīdṛso bandhur asmin kāle viśeṣataḥ* ||

298 3.33.1: *sacivān abhyanujñāya kāryaṃ buddhvā jagāma ha* ||

299 Rāvaṇa tells Mārīca: 3.38.9: *saṃpṛṣṭena tu vaktavyaṃ sacivena vipaścitā* | 3.38.14: *guṇadoṣau na pṛcchāmi kṣamaṃ cātmani rākṣasa* ||

300 5.35.9: Sītā tells Hanumān: *vibhīṣaṇena ca bhrātrā mama niryātanaṃ prati | anunītaḥ prayatnena na ca tat kurute matim* ||

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the eve of the arrival of Rāma and Sugrīva and others in Laṅkā, Rāvaṇa allowed Vibhīṣaṇa to repeat his advice again and again, although at the end of it he, Rāvaṇa, was overcome by anger and cursed and execrated his brother.[301] We see then that the behaviour of Rāma of the *U–K* who ordered his brothers to voice no comment is most unlike that of the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa and is in fact much worse than that of Rāvaṇa.

§8.5 In the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, whenever Rāma fell into sorrow or anger or despair, Lakṣmaṇa or Sugrīva would remonstrate with him and ask him to stop behaving like an 'ordinary' uncultured (*prākṛta*) man; Rāma would then recover his normal composure and express his appreciation of them.[302] On the other hand, the Rāma of the *U–K* acknowledged that he had "fallen into the ocean of sorrow,"[303] and yet strictly forbade his brothers from making any comment on his decision to exile Sītā.

§8.6 The Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa is portrayed not only as most truthful but also as loving his wife Sītā so much that he could never leave her behind or abandon her; he himself says that she was dear to him as his own life, indeed even dearer than his own life and that he could not live without her even for a short while. Even the Rākṣasas Mārīca and Rāvaṇa said the same of Rāma.[304] Vālmīki also declared that for Rāma, Sītā was dearer than life itself.[305] Whereas the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa had declared before the assembled Devas themselves that he can never abandon Sītā,[306] the Rāma of the *U–K* arranged for the

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301 6.10.11: Rāvaṇa tells Vibhīṣaṇa: *anyastv evaṃ vidhaṃ brūyāt vākyam etan niśācara | asmin muhūrte na bhavet tvāṃ tu dhik kulapāṃsanam ||*

302 See 3.62.1: *taṃ tathā śokasaṃtaptaṃ vilapantam anāthavat | . . . || tataḥ saumitrir āśvāsya muhūrtād iva lakṣmaṇaḥ | rāmaṃ sambodhayāmāsa . . .* || 3.62.13: śocituṃ nārhase vīra yathānyaḥ prākṛtas tathā || 3.63.1, 3: *pūrvajo 'py uktamātras tu lakṣmaṇena subhāṣitam | sāragrāhī mahāsāraṃ pratijagrāha rāghavaḥ | . . . rāmo lakṣmaṇam abravīt || kiṃ kariṣyāvahe vatsa kva vā gacchāva lakṣmaṇa | kenopāyena paśyeyaṃ sītām iti vicintaya* || 4.26.9, 12: *alaṃ vīra vyathāṃ gatvā na tvaṃ śocitum arhasi | . . . samunmūlaya śokaṃ tvaṃ vyavasāyaṃ sthiraṃ kuru |*
See also 3.61.9ff, etc.

303 Rāma describes himself: *U–K* 44.14: *tasmād bhavantaḥ paśyantu patitaṃ śokasāgare |*

304 See for instance 2.27.27; 3.56.4; 3.35.19; 3.38.6; 3.59.24; 3.63.26.

305 4.26.6: Vālmīki says that to Rāma, Sītā was dearer than life: "*prāṇebhyo 'pi garīyasī*".

306 6.106.18: Rāma tells Agni and other devas: *na hi hātum iyaṃ śakyā kīrtir ātmavatā yathā* ||

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abandonment of Sītā, did not even have any discussion whatsoever with her about it, and continued to rule as king for many years as though nothing had happened. We see that the behaviour of the Rāma of the *U–K* is in sharp contrast with that of the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa.

§8.7 Also, for quite some years the Rāma of the *U–K* seems to have had no curiosity about the fate of his wife Sītā who had been banished from his kingdom, nor about the fate of the baby/babies, he had fathered through her. His behaviour is in strong contrast to that of the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa who was madly in love with his wife, was most compassionate and was also devoted to righteousness — a righteousness that transcended mere *Kṣatriyadharma.*

§9.1 The Śambūka story blames a Śūdra's *tapas* for a Brahmin boy's death hundreds of miles away. It takes the stand that the Śūdra deserved to be killed for his 'offence' and it gloats that the Brahmin boy came back to life when Rāma beheaded the Śūdra. But the story is contradictory to the spirit of the Rāmāyaṇa and is apparently the creation, not of Vālmīki but, at a later date, of some extreme conservative person. For, the story not only contradicts what the Rāmāyaṇa says more than once, that during Rāma's reign there were no child deaths,[307] but it also contradicts what the *Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa* says about śūdras performing *tapas.* The *Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa* refers to a young Śūdra (the son of a Śūdra woman), as well as a Śūdra woman (Śabarī) as ascetics engaged in *tapas* (2.57.18, 20, 37; 3.70.7). In the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, both Rāma and Vālmīki refer to Guha, of the lowly hunter tribe, as Rāma's friend dear to him as his own self (ātmasamaḥ sakhā).[308] The feeling was not one–sided condescension; for instance, when Rāma met with Guha, the latter took the initiative and embraced Rāma. This shows that in the days described by Vālmīki there was no distinction based on sex, *jāti, varṇa,* or race etc. Rāma's first words to Śabarī, a Śūdra woman, of the "lowly" hunter tribe, were to enquire whether her *tapas* was proceeding well [309] without

307 1.1.72: *na putramaraṇaṃ kecid drakṣyanti puruṣāḥ kvacit* |
6.116.85: *na ca sma vṛddhā bālānāṃ pretakāryāṇi kurvate* ||

308 2.44.9: Vālmīki says: *tatra rājā guho nāma* rāmasya ātmasamaḥ sakhā | In 6.113.5 Rāma himself refers to Guha as his ātmasamaḥ sakhā.

309 3.70.7: *kaccit te nirjitā vighnāḥ kaccit te vardhate* ***tapaḥ*** |

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hindrance from anybody. Rāma looked upon everybody equally, making no distinction based on sex, *varṇa*, *jāti* ("caste") or even race.[310] Among those he revered were his dearest friends were Śabarī and Guha, both of them of the hunter tribe, the vulture Jaṭāyu, the monkeys Sugrīva and Hanumān, and the rākṣasa Vibhīṣaṇa. Finally, in regard to the *U–K* story of Rāma killing the śūdra ascetic Śambūka, we first note that Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa says that Daśaratha realized that he had committed *a great sin* (*mahatpāpam*) when he had *unwittingly* killed a śūdra practitioner of *tapas*[311] and, as the Śūdra ascetic's father reminded Daśaratha, it would have been a far greater sin if the killing had been intentional.[312] Certainly, Daśaratha's son Rāma, described as righteous and learned, and who showed such high regard for the Śūdra *tapasvinī* Śabarī and looked upon the *niṣāda* Guha as his *ātmasamaḥ sakhā*, would not have *intentionally* killed the Śūdra ascetic Śambūka for performing *tapas*. We see then that the Rāma of Śambūka story cannot be the Rāma of the Rāmāyaṇa and the story is certainly not by Vālmīki.

§ 9.2 Thus we find that the *U–K* repeatedly paints a picture of Rāma that is very different from the picture of Rāma in Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa and one can only conclude that Vālmīki could not have been the author of the *Uttara–K*āṇḍa, and that the *U–K* cannot be a part of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa.

Characterization of Sītā

§10.1 The Sītā of the *U–K* is portrayed as a weak and submissive person, meekly accepting her exile ordered by her husband even though she has done no wrong, was faithful and devoted to him and was free of all blame.[313] She neither questioned, nor argued or protested her husband's

310 More than a thousand years later, Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār would sing about this with wondrous admiration and love (see *Periya Tirumoḻi* 5.8.1).

311 Daśaratha tells Kausalyā: 2.58.1: *tad ajñānāt mahatpāpaṃ kṛtvā . . .*

312 2.58.20: *kṣatriyeṇa vadho rājan vānaprasthe viśeṣataḥ | jñānapūrvaṃ kṛtaḥ sthānāt cyāvayed api vajriṇam* ||

313 We can see clearly in some of the interpolations made, as to how the *U–K* was utilized to preach that a wife should gladly accept whatever treatment she gets from her husband. For instance, one interpolation says that Sītā cried sorrowfully and told Lakṣmaṇa who left her in the *tapovana*, across the Ganges and beyond the kingdom

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action. The *U–K* thus portrays Sītā as accepting that a husband may treat his wife however harshly and unjustly as he pleases, and that his wife should meekly accept such treatment.

But that is not how the Sītā of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa is portrayed by Vālmīki. As soon as Rāma told her that he was going to the forest and that she should remain in Ayodhyā (2.23.34), she protested angrily (2.24.1: *saṃkruddhā*). Rāma persisted and told her, "You must stay here and do your duty . . . You must do as I say" (2.25.2–3: *iha ācara svadharmaṃ tvaṃ mā yathā manasaḥ sukham || site yathā tvāṃ vakṣyāmi tathā kāryaṃ tvayā abale* |). He went on to cite the dangers of life in the forest. Then Sītā angrily asked him, "Did my father give me in marriage to a woman with the body of a man?" (2.27.3). Sowe see that the Sītā of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa did not meekly accept whatever her husband said.

Later too in the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, Sītā is portrayed as brave and strong. After she was abducted by Rāvaṇa, she was offered enticements and threats, by Rāvaṇa himself and by the Rākṣasis guarding her, but she spurned them all.[314] Later still when Rāvaṇa had been killed and Rāma uttered words rejecting her, she forcefully argued against his reasoning (that an abducted woman should not be welcomed back into the family); she publicly rebuked him for speaking like an uncultured person, and she proved that Rāma was wrong, by herself doing an *agni–praveśa* and emerging gloriously out of the fire.

That is how the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa portrays the fortitude of Sītā. But we saw that the Sītā of the *U–K* is portrayed as weak and submissive, meekly accepting her unjust banishment by Rāma.

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of Ayodhyā, to convey to Rāma her obeisance and that she said that "the husband alone is the wife's deity, relative and *guru,* and dearer than life" — a statement which can be interpreted only as meek subservience to the husband. See CE 7. 888*, line 1: Words attributed to Sītā: *patir hi daivatam nāryāḥ patir bandhuḥ patir gatiḥ* || The interpolation of this passage at this juncture is significant, even though similar statements were made by the ascetic Anasūyā and by Sītā herself during their meeting. See: 2.109.24, 2.110.3–5.

314 3. *Sargas* 53–54; 5.sargas 18–21, etc. I totally disagree with Velchuri Narayana Rao (2004: p. 223) who says that the Sītā of the *Sundara–kāṇḍa* is "weak" but "skilful in prodding her man to become the hero he has to be" and that it is she who makes Rāma the warrior and punisher of demons.

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§10.2 The fact that the Sītā of the *U–K* was pregnant when she learnt of her exile should have really added to her strength; but the *U–K* portrays her as a weakling without any spirit, and as practically thanking Rāma for abandoning her. Thus, we see that the Sītā of the *U–K* is totally unlike the Sītā of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa.

Characterization of Lakṣmaṇa

§11.1 Let us compare the portrayal of Lakṣmaṇa in the *Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa* and in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The Lakṣmaṇa of *Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa* is a devoted son and a devoted brother. But he had strong feelings that he expressed freely, and would not blindly accept what a person of authority says, whether it be a king, a father or an elder brother. He was furious that his father, the king Daśaratha, had given boons to Kaikeyī as a result of which Rāma was to go into exile; he was ready to depose Daśaratha by force of arms; and he expressed his anger against his elder brother Rāma for meekly accepting exile as his "fate".[315]

§11.2 In the *Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa*, whenever Rāma fell into despair, Lakṣmaṇa, though he was the younger brother, used to chide him, comfort him and give him advice; and Rāma appreciated receiving such advice.[316] Verses 3.60.52 and 3.61.1 describe Rāma as overcome by great sorrow and rage at the loss of Sītā, and was prepared to destroy all the worlds; Lakṣmaṇa's words of advice calmed him; Rāma acknowledged the value of the advice and indeed asked for further advice as to what they should do next (3.63.1, 3).[317] In the *Yuddha–Kāṇḍa* of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, Lakṣmaṇa could not bear to hear Rāma's harsh words rejecting Sītā and looked angrily at Rāma; and he lit the fire for Sītā's *agni–praveśa* only after reading a reassuring message in Rāma's face [namely, that Rāma

315 2.19.19: (Rāma said): *kaścid daivena saumitre yoddhum utsahate pumān* ; 2.20.11: (Lakṣmaṇa replied): *viklavo vīryhīno yaḥ sa daivam anuvartate | vīrāḥ sambhāvitātmāno na daivaṃ paryupāsate* ||

316 See e.g. 2.19.19; 2.20.11; 2.47.30; 3.62.1, 13; 4.26.12–17.

317 According to some versions of the Rāmāyaṇa, once when Rāma was sunk in despair and was about to discharge an arrow that would have wrought great havoc in the world, Lakṣmaṇa simply grabbed the bow from Rāma's hand, chided him and calmed him. See 6. 244* lines 3–4 [6.21.33]: *saumitrir utpatya viniśvasantaṃ mā meti coktvā dhanur ālalambe* ||

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knew that Sītā was pure and that Sītā will not be hurt by the fire but emerge from it with great glory].[318]

§11.3 The behaviour of the Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa of the *U–K* is in striking contrast with that of the Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa of the *Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa.* The Rāma of the *U–K* announced his decision to banish Sītā whom he knew to be blameless, afraid that otherwise, his subjects would speak ill of him; he admitted that he was sunk in sorrow (U–K 44.10–14). But instead of seeking the advice of Lakṣmaṇa and his other brothers as the Rāma of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa would have done, the Rāma of the *U–K* ordered them not to make any comments on his decision (U–K 44.18), and ordered Lakṣmaṇa to ferry Sītā out of the country — and the Lakṣmaṇa of the *U–K* uttered not a word in protest, but meekly carried out Rāma's order.

The behaviour of the Lakṣmaṇa of the *U–K* is in sharp contrast with that of the Lakṣmaṇa of Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa proper. The Lakṣmaṇa of Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa proper had expressed his virulent condemnation of his father King Daśaratha's action leading to Rāma's banishment; in particular he said that he knew of no crime committed by Rāma, nor of any fault of Rāma's that would justify the banishment (2.52.18: *kenāyaṃ aparādhena rājaputro vivāSītāḥ*). Even Rāma could not fully pacify him, for not long afterwards Lakṣmaṇa sent a stinging message to Daśaratha through Sumantra, saying that Rāma's banishment was a rash and perverse act and that he, Lakṣmaṇa disowned the king as his father (2.52.21: *ahaṃ tāvan mahārāje pitṛtvam nopalakṣaye*).

But in the *Uttarakāṇḍa,* when Rāma announced his decision to banish Sītā even though (by his own admission) he knew her to totally blameless, Lakṣmaṇa raised no protest whatever and meekly carried out the banishment of Sītā. The *U–K* does not say that Lakṣmaṇa cast not the slightest angry or disapproving look at his brother. He meekly took Sītā to the forest, told her she was being abandoned, and left her there. This is not what one would expect of the Lakṣmaṇa of the Rāmāyaṇa proper,

318 See the chapter on *Sītā's agni–praveśa.*

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who has been described above and who regarded Sītā as his mother and as a deity to be worshipped.[319]

§11.4 In acting as described above, the Lakṣmaṇa of the *U–K* thus failed in his duty as advisor to his brother. *Vālmīkī's* Rāmayaṇa stresses again and again that it is the duty of a king's counsellor to advise the king against following a wrong course of action, whatever may be the cost of offering the advice; it does so through the words of Mārīca to Rāvaṇa,[320] through the repeated advice of Vibhīṣaṇa to Rāvaṇa and through the words of Hanumān who tells King Sugrīva, "a counsellor must put aside fear and tell the king what is good for him" and gives him sharp advice.[321] Mārīca, and later on Vibhīṣaṇa use identical words and tell King Rāvaṇa that there are plenty of people who will say things that are pleasing to the ear, and rare is the person who would give proper advice even if it be not pleasant to hear; and that likewise, rare is the person who would listen to such advice; but that *it is the duty of a good counsellor to advise what is good, even if it be unpleasant to hear*;[322] since both Mārīca and Vibhīṣaṇa use identical words, it would appear that they were quoting a well known maxim. Both Mārīca and Vibhīṣaṇa gave proper advice to Rāvaṇa, even though they knew that it would invite his wrath: Mārīca advised him against abducting Sītā, and Vibhīṣaṇa advised him, repeatedly, that Sītā should be returned to Rāma. Of course, in both cases, Rāvaṇa reacted with great anger.[323] However, the Lakṣmaṇa of the *U–K* did not offer even one word of advice or protest to Rāma on the latter's decision to exile

319 2.35.8: Lakṣmaṇa's mother Sumitrā told him: *rāmaṃ daśarathaṃ viddhi māṃ viddhi janakātmajām* | Also, Sītā said of Lakṣmaṇa to Hanumān: 5.36.46: *pitṛvad vartate rāme mātṛvan mām samācaran*; 3.43.26: Lakṣmaṇa tells Sītā, "*daivataṃ bhavatī mama.*"

320 3.39.7: *amātyaiḥ kāmavṛtto hi rājā kāpatham āśritaḥ | nigrāhyaḥ sarvathā sadbhiḥ sa nigrāhyo na gṛhyase* ||

321 4.31.18: Hanumān said to King Sugrīva: *niyuktair mantribhir vācyo avaśyaṃ pārthivo hitam | ata eva bhayaṃ tyaktvā bravīmy avadhṛtaṃ vacaḥ* ||

322 Both Mārīca in 3.35.2 and Vibhīṣaṇa in 6.10.16 use identical words: *sulabhāḥ puruṣā rājan satataṃ priyavādinaḥ | apriyasya ca pathyasya vaktā śrotā ca durlabhaḥ* ||

323 3.38.9: Rāvaṇa admonished Mārīca: *saṃpṛṣṭena tu vaktavyaṃ sacivena vipaścitā* | 6.10.11: Rāvaṇa scolds and insults Vibhīṣaṇa: *anyastv evaṃvidhaṃ brūyāt vākyam vākyam etan niśācara | asmin muhūrte na bhavet tvāṃ tu dhik kulapāṃsanam* ||

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Sītā — so unlike the Lakṣmaṇa of the Rāmāyaṇa who did not heSītāte to question or to advice against what Rāma intended to do.

§11.5 In the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa, when Rāma said that it was only due to fate that he has to go into exile and that no one is capable of contesting fate, Lakṣmaṇa angrily retorted that only the weak and cowardly submit to fate;[324] but the Lakṣmaṇa of the *U-K* says that Sītā's having had to go into exile was due to fate, that fate cannot be conquered and that Rāma, a "tiger among men", should simply accept Sītā's exile as his fate, for the brave do not sorrow over their fate.[325] Thus, the behaviour of the Lakṣmaṇa of the *U-K* is again seen to be very unlike that of the Lakṣmaṇa of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa.

§11.6 We see then that the author of the *U-K* portrays not only Rāma and Sītā, but also Lakṣmaṇa in a manner inconsistent with Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa.

§12 Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa portrays some women as strong and evil, like Tāṭakā and Śūrpaṇakhā; and it portrays many more women as strong and noble, or as great ascetics, or as extremely wise, like Kuśanābha's daughters, and Anasūyā, Svayamprabhā, Śabarī, Tārā, Manḍodarī, Vibhīṣaṇa's wife Saramā, and, of course, Sītā herself. *No woman* is portrayed as weak; no woman is portrayed as forcibly violated by any one (except by Rāvaṇa). The *U-K* on the other hand portrays women as weak; Vedavatī was a noble ascetic, but, unable to stand up against Rāvaṇa, immolated herself; many were the women who were forcibly violated by Rāvaṇa. Sītā is also portrayed as weak and submissive. This again suggests that the *U-K* is not by Vālmīki.

§13 There are also other inconsistencies and defects in the *U-K* story of *Sītā-parityāga.* The story ignores the question of justice for Sītā.

324 Rāma says: 2.19.13: *kṛtāntas tveva saumitre draṣṭavyo matpravāsane* | 2.19.19: *kaścid daivena saumitre yoddhum utsahate pumān* | Lakṣmaṇa retorts: 2.20.11: *viklavo vīryahīno yaḥ sa daivam anuvartate* |

325 Lakṣmaṇa says to Sumantra: *U-K* 49.4: *vyaktaṃ daivād ahaṃ manye rāghavasya vinābhavam* | *vaidehyā sārathe sārdhaṃ daivaṃ hi duratikramam* || Lakṣmaṇa tells Rāma: *U-K* 51.9: *mā śucaḥ puruṣavyāghra kālasya gatir īdṛśī* | *tvadvidhā na hi śocanti sattvavanto manasvinaḥ* ||

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The Rāma of the Vālmīki-rāmāyaṇa is described as righteous and most compassionate towards all. But the Rāma of the *U-K* showed no concern for the rights and the welfare of Sītā and her then yet-to-be-born babies. And it was not righteous of him to condemn Sītā to exile on the basis of rumours that he knew to be false and were critical of *his* action of taking her back; and he exiled Sītā without giving her an opportunity to say anything — indeed without even telling her that she was to be exiled, and what for — and refusing to allow anyone to speak against his decision to exile her. In a matter that touched him personally, justice requires that the Rāma of the *U-K* should have consulted his advisors — his brothers and other ministers and Vasiṣṭa and Bharadvāja and others — but he did not. This contrasts with his behaviour when an aged Brahmin appeared before him in his court and complained that during Rāma's reign his young son had died prematurely — that is, that the boy's death was due to some fault of Rāma's (7.64.9); Rāma then consulted with his advisors and ministers.

§14 The *U-K* story of Sītā's banishment to the forest give rise to a number of questions for which it contains no answer. For instance, where is the justice for Sītā in that story? Is not the life and welfare and the rights of Sītā and her then yet-to-be-born babies entitled to the same concern that Rāma, who is described in the Rāmāyaṇa proper as most compassionate, showed towards others? It was Rāma himself who had taught Sītā that compassion is one's greatest *dharma*, as Sītā asked Hanumān to remind him (5.36.34: ānṛśaṃsyaṃ paro dharmas tvatta eva mayā śrutaḥ). In a matter that touched him personally, how can Rāma the "righteous" assume the role of prosecutor and judge and condemn Sītā to banishment without giving her an opportunity to say anything — indeed without even letting her know of her "punishment" (exile), or even what she is exiled for, till her banishment had been carried out? There are other points to be noted too. Sītā cannot be banished without people noticing her absence and raising questions. Indeed, if Rāma wanted to transform the widespread disapproval of the people that triggered his order to exile Sītā into approval, he would have had to give wide publicity to his exiling her. Did the people approve of his action?

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The *U–K* does not say. What did the wives of Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna say? Did King Janaka keep quiet? And did Vasiṣṭa and Agastya and Bharadvāja also keep quiet? And of course Rāma's ministers and other courtiers and the general public — did they condemn, condone or congratulate Rāma on his action? Why did not Rāma go to the sages Vasiṣṭa, Agastya, Viśvāmitra or Bharadvāja for advice? Why did not Daśaratha consult his council of ministers, as he did in the Śambūka story? The *U–K* has no answer to these and many other questions too. The plot of the *U–K* is very weak and full of holes, unlike that of the Rāmāyaṇa proper. It is therefore no wonder that so many poets like Bhavabhūti and Kālidāsa and others felt at liberty to modify the story of Sītā's banishment in many different ways.

III. Is the *U–K* a source of critical information?

§15.1 The *Uttara-kāṇḍa*, which reads like a purāṇa, really adds little or no information that is relevant for the story of Rāma. Almost all the details it gives about Rāmāyaṇa personages are already found in the Rāmāyaṇa.[326]

§15.2 Sometimes the *U–K* gives "information" in a ridiculous fashion. For instance, it describes Anaraṇya as cursing Rāvaṇa that one of his descendants will kill him;[327] this is somewhat similar to Kaṁsa being cursed that Devaki's eighth child would kill him. Kaṁsa then set about killing Devaki's children. But Rāvaṇa seems to have shown no interest in even learning about Anaraṇya's descendants, and not even of Rāma, who, while yet a boy, had killed Tāṭakā (mother of Mārīca, Rāvaṇa's uncle); indeed, Śūrpaṇakhā repeatedly berates Rāvaṇa for not having employed spies, who would have told him about Rāma, his prowess

326 For instance: (1) Rāvaṇa , son of Viśravas and half–brother of Kubera; (2) Rāvaṇa's boon from Brahmā; (3) Rāvaṇa's siblings Kumbhakarṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and Śūrpaṇakhā; (4) Rāvaṇa 's half–brothers Khara and Dūṣaṇa; (5) Rāvaṇa defeats Kubera and takes Puṣpaka; (6) Brahmā's boon to Kumbhakarṇa; (7) Vedavatī's curse (8) Vālī, son of Indra; Sugrīva, son of Sūrya; Hanumān, son of Vāyu; (9) Hanumān's immunity from weapons; (10) Mandodari, daughter of Maya and married to Rāvaṇa; (11) Due to a curse, Rāvaṇa cannot forcibly violate any woman.

327 *U–K*, 19.24: *utpatsyate kule hy asmin ikṣvākūṇāṃ mahātmanām | rājā paramatejasvī yas te prāṇān hariṣyati* ||

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and his actions; Mārīca berated him likewise and had to tell him about Rāma.[328]

§15.3 Another critical matter that the *U–K* does not explain is the following. It says that Indra prayed to Viṣṇu to wage war against Rāvaṇa and kill him, although they knew of Rāvaṇa's invincibility by the Devas and any other beings, other than men and monkeys (7.27.12, 19). *Sargas* 31–33 are on Rāvaṇa's defeat by Kārtavīrya Arjuna of Māhishmati, a man; *Sarga* 34 describes Rāvaṇa's humiliation by the monkey Vālī. This means that there were at least one mighty human and one mighty monkey — and perhaps there were more of them, and other beings too — who were neither Devas nor Asuras and who were capable of defeating Rāvaṇa. Why did not the Devas seek out such a man or monkey? After all, it would appear that they had at some time sought the help of Vālī himself; that is how Vālī was awarded the golden necklace by Indra. (4.23.28: Tārā said to Vālī: *yā dattā devar*ājena tava tuṣṭena saṃyuge).

§15.4 Sometimes, the "information" given by the *U–K* is inconsistent. For instance, early in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Pulastya is praised most highly as a "brahmarṣi, possessing a great intellect and righteousness, a *dharmātmā* whose good qualities cannot be praised adequately."[329] Yet when his grandson Rāvaṇa was constantly harassing the Devas, Rishis, Yakṣas and Gandharvas, *Pulastya seems to have offered his grandson no advice or reprimand not to do so; nor does the U–K say that Pulastya reproached Rāvaṇa for his attempt to violate Vedavatī.*[330] Rāvaṇa forcibly carried off numerous other women too; his younger brother Vibhīṣaṇa condemned the abductions,[331] *but the U–K does not indicate that Pulastya ever*

328 Śūrpaṇakhā berates Rāvaṇa: see 12–3.31.5 and Mārīca: 5–3.35.3.

329 For instance, *U–K*, 2.4–7 describes Pulastya using the words *brahmarṣi, nānukīrtyā guṇās tasya dharmataḥ, munipuṅgavaḥ* and *dharmātmā.*

330 *U–K* 13.8: . . . *daśānanaḥ | deva–ṛṣi–yakṣa–gandharvān bādhate sma sa nityaśaḥ* || For the Vedavatī episode, see *sarga* 17 of the *Uttarakāṇḍa.*

331 *U–K* 24.2–3: *darśanīyāṃ hi yāṃ rakṣaḥ kanyāṃ strīṃ vātha paśyati | hatvā bandhujanaṃ tasyā vimāne saṃnyaveśayat || tatra pannagayakṣāṇāṃ mānuṣāṇāṃ ca rakṣasām | daityānāṃ dānavānāṃ ca kanyā jagrāha rāvaṇaḥ* || *U–K* 25.20: Vibhīṣaṇa tells Rāvaṇa: *jñātīn vai dharṣayitvā imās tvayānītāh varāṅganāḥ* | The *Rāmāyaṇa* also says that Rāvaṇa violated the wives of many men: see e.g. 3.30.12: *ucchettāraṃ ca dharmāṇāṃ paradārābhimarśanam.* Rāvaṇa himself boasts to Sītā that he has carried off numerous noble women from various places: 3.45.24: *bahvīnām uttamastrīṇām*

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came and admonished Rāvaṇa. Similarly, when Rāvaṇa forcibly violated Rambhā, the wife of his brother Kubera's son Naḷakūbara, and who therefore deserved to be treated as his daughter-in-law, [332]*the U-K does not say that Pulastya condemned his grandson's action in any way.* On the other hand, the *U-K* describes how Rāvaṇa went to pick up a fight with Arjuna (of Mahiṣmati), but suffered a humiliating defeat and was captured by Arjuna; that as soon as Pulastya heard of it, he rushed to request Arjuna to release Rāvaṇa and that Arjuna granted the request.[333] But *the U-K does not say that Pulastya gave his grandson Rāvaṇa any admonition or sobering advice whatsoever.* We see that Pulastya, who tolerated without a murmur or disapproving word the heinous crimes of his evil grandson, is described by the *U-K* in glorious terms as a Brahmarṣi, possessing a great intellect, as a *dharmātmā* etc. This shows that the *U-K* is inconsistent and ineptly constructed and suggests that the *U-K* is not by Vālmīki.

§16.1 There are also instances where the *U-K contradicts* Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa. We have seen some instances in our discussion of the two stories that form the heart of the *U-K.* (Few more are given below.)

§16.2 (i) The *U-K* says that Sugrīva and other monkeys and bears stayed on in Ayodhyā for more than two months after Rāma's coronation; this is inconsistent with *Vālmīkī's* Rāmāyaṇa which says that after witnessing Rāma's coronation and receiving various presents from Rāma at the end of it, Sugrīva and Vibhīṣaṇa and their companions returned to their abodes, that is, to Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā respectively);[334] that is, it says that Sugrīva and others stayed in Ayodhyā only for a very short time after the coronation. Thus, the *U-K* again contradicts the *Rāmāyaṇa.*

āhṛtānām itas tataḥ | sarvāsāmeva bhadram te mamāgramahiṣī bhava || Similarly in 5.7.5, 5.10.22. He claims that as a rākṣasa he has every right to forcibly carry off any woman (see 5.18.5).

332 Rambhā pleaded repeatedly: *U-K* 26.21, 23: *dharmataś ca snuṣā te 'haṃ tattvam etad bravīmi te | . . . dharmatas te sutasyāhaṃ bhāryā rākṣasapuṅgava* ||

333 See *U-K* 33.1-3, 16-17.

334 See *U-K* 38.15, 17. Cf. 6.116.76: *yathārhaṃ pūjitāḥ sarve kāmai ratnaiś ca puṣkalaiḥ | prahṛṣṭamanasaḥ sarve jagmur eva yathāgatam* ||

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(ii) The Rāma of the *U–K* refers to Sītā's *agni–praveśa* in Laṅkā and says that Sītā was restored to him by *Mahendra*;[335] but the Rāmāyaṇa says that it was *Agni deva* who restored her.[336]

(iii) Another instance is the telling of the story of Ahalyā. The story is told in the *Bālakāṇḍa* itself, and there is no need for the *U–K* to give its version of the story. And the *U–K* version contradicts the version given by Vālmīki. Vālmīki says that Gautama cursed Indra to lose his testicles; but the *U–K* says that Gautama cursed Indra that he would be captured by his enemies.[337]

(iv) The *U–K* (*Sargas 33–34*) says that after his release by Arjuna, Rāvaṇa again in his foolish arrogance, went to Kiṣkindhā to challenge Vālī to a fight; but he was humiliated (even before a fight) by Vālī who caught him, kept him a prisoner in his armpit and went about his ablutions. The *U–K* says that Rāvaṇa then sought and made a friendship pact with Vālī and that he lived in Vālī's palace for a month, like the crown–prince Sugrīva.[338]

Now, during that month Sugrīva must have come to know a lot about Rāvaṇa. Yet, when Rāma met him in Ṛśyamūka, Sugrīva said he knew nothing whatever about Rāvaṇa – his power, valour or his family. Recall that Sugrīva is described as a *dharmātmā, mahātmā*, of good character, *satyasaṃdha* etc.[339] This would mean that Sugrīva was not truthful in his denial. It suggests that the *U–K* statement quoted above contradicts Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa.

§17 The numerous instances where the *U–K* is inconsistent with the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa and the spurious nature of the story of Sītā's exile to

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335 *U–K* 44.8: Rāma of the *U–K* says: *laṅkādvīpe* ***mahendreṇa*** *mama haste niveśitā* | This contradicts what the Ramāyaṇa says. See the next note.

336 6.106.3: The Rāmāyaṇa says: *dadau rāmāya vaidehīm aṅke kṛtvā* ***vibhāvasuḥ*** ||

337 Gautama cursed Indra: 1.47.26: *akartavyam idaṃ yasmād viphalas tvam bhaviṣyasi* ||
But the *U–K* gives: U–K 30.29: *tasmāt tvaṃ samare rājan śatruhastaṃ gamiṣyasi* ||

338 See *U–K* 34.42: *sa tatra māsam uṣitaḥ sugrīva iva rāvaṇaḥ;*
U–K 36.37 says that when Ṛkṣrajas died, Vālī was made king and Sugrīva was made the crown prince: *pitṛye pade kṛto vālī sugrīvo vālinaḥ pade* |

339 See e.g.: 3.69.26–32, 3.71.7; 4.2.4. (See also the Rāma–Sugrīva chapter.)

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the forest and of the Śambūka story — almost the only important part of the *U–K* — shows that the *U–K* cannot be a part of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa, and that its author is not Vālmīki.

IV. On claims that the *U–K* should be considered to be a part of the Rāmayaṇa

§18.1 Some scholars claim that the *U–K* is a "part of the Rāmayaṇa tradition";[340] but they do not state clearly the sense in which they use the term 'Rāmayaṇa tradition.' They seem to claim, in effect, that every ancient or modern piece of writing, or song or film, whether it is a sundry poem or a piece of creative fiction, or part of a politician's diatribe, that speaks of a Rāma, Sītā or Rāvaṇa is part of the 'Rāmayaṇa tradition' — even if only a microscopic minority of the people from which the writer comes have read or even heard of those writings. We examine the critics' claim by considering how the *Sītā–parityāga* and Śambūka stories that form the heart of the *U–K* have been treated in works of the past 2000 years and more.

§18.2 We start with six early works, in chronological order, *that mention neither of the two stories*: (1) The *Rāmopākhyāna* (100 BCE?), a part of the *Mahābhārata*, gives the story of Rāma in *20 Sargas*. Its authors knew the *U–K* [as it was in their time]. (2) The *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the oldest extant purāṇa, contains a summary mentioning all the highpoints of the story of Rāma. (3–4) Bhāsa (300–400 CE) is probably the earliest playwright to write any play devoted exclusively to the story of Rāma. His plays *Pratimānāṭaka* and *Abhiṣekanāṭaka* are both generally faithful to the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, but neither of them contains anything from the *Uttara–Kāṇḍa*. (5) Kumāradāsa (500–700 CE) ends *Jānakīharaṇa*, his story of Rāma, with the consecration of Rāma as king, and completely ignores the *Uttara–kāṇḍa*. (6) Bhaṭṭi (600–700 CE) in his *Rāvaṇavadha* (also known as *Bhaṭṭikāvya*) gives a summary of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, but completely ignores the *Uttara–Kāṇḍa*. (7) So does Bhavabhūti's (700–800 CE) *Mahāvīracarita* on the story of Rāma. His *Uttararāmacarita* has little in common with either Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa or the *Uttara–Kāṇḍa*. It makes skeletal references to the killing of Śambūka

340 See e.g. P Richman (1991: *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, p.8).

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and the exile of Sītā, but it is mainly concerned with making changes to the latter story so that Rāma and Sītā are finally joyfully united. The point for us is that Bhavabhūti wrote two *distinct works,* one dealing with themes from the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa and the other dealing with themes from the *Uttara–K*āṇḍa, thus suggesting that in his opinion the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa and the *U–K* were distinct works. (8) Diṅnāga (Dhīranāga) (300–600 CE? 850–950 CE?): His *Kundanmālā* is said to be modelled on the *Uttararāmacarita* or was the model for it, and so need not be discussed separately. (9) The Āśca*ryacūḍāmaṇi* of Śaktibhadra (800–900 CE) generally closely follows Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa, but with some minor deviations. It too omits the *Uttara–kāṇḍa.*[341] (10) So does the play *Anargha*rāghava of Murāri (800–1000 CE).

§18.3 Kāḷidāsa's (400–500 CE) *Raghuvaṃśa* presents several tales of Raghu's (fictional) dynasty, as well as about Rāma and his descendants. Its primary focus is not Rāma, and it gives creative versions of the Sītā–parityāga and Śambūka stories of the *Uttara–K*āṇḍa. But this only shows that Kāḷidāsa was aware of those stories, and it does not mean that he considered them to be part of Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa. In any event, we see that for 2000 years or more after Vālmīki, the Sanskrit works dealing primarily with the story of Rāma either ignore the *U–K* or treat it as a work distinct from the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa.

§18.4 Let us now look at three examples of how the Rāma story was, and is, handled in the regional languages of India. The most significant as well as the most ancient of the Rāmāyaṇa texts is the epic poem *Irāmāvatāram* (popularly known as *Kamba–Rāmāyaṇam*) of Kamban (800–1000 CE) in over ten thousand verses in Tamil. For centuries it has been, and continues to be, *THE* Rāmāyaṇa for the people of Tamil Nāḍu, where less than about three per cent of the population knows Sanskrit (or Hindi). It follows Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa fairly closely and gives a fine poetic treatment of the narrative. It is divided into six parts, corresponding exactly to the six kāṇḍas of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa. It ends with Rāma's return to Ayodhyā and his consecration as the king and completely ignores the *U–K.*

341 J L Brockington (1984): p. 247.

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§18.5 The oldest Rāma-kathā in Telugu is the *Sri Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* by Gona Buddhareddy, said to have been composed around 1240 C.E. It too ends with the coronation of Rāma and has no material from the *Uttara-kāṇḍa*.

Viswanatha Satyanarayana, a 20th century Telugu poet is the author of *Rāmāyaṇa kalpavṛkṣamu*, immensely popular among the Telugu-speaking people; the author even received the prestigious *Jñānāgni-praveśaīṭha* award. It too follows Vālmīki, and has no material from the *Uttara-K*āṇḍa.

Thus, the most popular Rāma-kathā texts in a large part of South India reject the *Uttara-kāṇḍa*.

§18.6 The situation in regard to North India is not different. The *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulsi Das in Avadhi (popular rural Hindi) is *THE* Rāmāyaṇa for hundreds of millions of people in North India and for the Hindu diaspora in the Caribbean and elsewhere; it too ignores the *Uttara-K*āṇḍa.

§18.7 The story of the earliest Rāmāyaṇa in Assamese has a history that is shrouded in some mystery. One version is that Mādhava Kāṇḍali in the 14th century wrote (in Assamese) only the five kāṇḍas *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍa* and that Śankaradeva and his disciple Mādhavadeva appended to it the *U-K* and the *Bāla-kāṇḍa* respectively. Significantly, the augmented text is called the *Saptakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* ("Rāmāyaṇa with seven kāṇḍas"). Śankaradeva's *Uttarā-kāṇḍa* is an extreme distortion of the Sanskrit *Uttara-kāṇḍa*.[342]

There are two points worthy of note here. *One,* If Mādhava Kāṇḍali did not include the *Bāla-* and *Uttara-K*āṇḍas in his narration of the Rāma-

342 W L Smith's claim that it is based on the Sanskrit *U-K* and "depends on Vālmīki and Vālmīki alone" (where he assumes that Vālmīki is the author of the Sanskrit *Uttara-kāṇḍa*) is incorrect. See William L Smith (1994). Curiously, Smith seems to mistake Bhavabhūti for Vālmīki; the statements he ascribes, on pp. 5-6, to "Vālmīki's *Uttara-kāṇḍa*" are not found anywhere in the *U-K*; but see verse 1.6 in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*. Smith's statements on p.7 that Śaṅkaradeva "bases his *Uttara-Kāṇḍa* on Vālmīki's original" and that "unlike his peers, [he] apparently depends on Vālmīki and Vālmīki alone" are also incorrect.

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kathā, was it perhaps because he considered that the two kāṇḍas were not really part of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa? *Two*, the authors who added an *Uttara–Kāṇḍa* to Kāṇḍali's narrative called it a "*Seven–Kāṇḍa* Rāmāyaṇa"; it suggests that in their opinion the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki had only six kāṇḍas and that the *U–K* was not really a part of the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa.

Thus we find that several Sanskrit poets, including Bhavabhūti and Diṅnāga, in their works on Rāma either have nothing in common with the Sanskrit U–K or treat the U–K as distinct from Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa (and therefore felt free to change the stories of Sītā's exile and Śambūka in any manner they pleased), and that the same is true of several ancient as well as the most popular poets in the regional languages of India.

§19 The relief structures of the Gupta period at Nācnā Kuṭhāra and Deogarh in Madhya Pradesh and the slightly later ones at Paṭṭaḍakala in Karnāṭaka which depict Rāmāyaṇa scenes do not include anything from the *Uttara–Kāṇḍa*.[343] It suggests, even if it does not *prove* that the *U–K* was regarded as a work distinct from the Rāmāyaṇa.

§ 20 Finally we look at how Hindus of *today* look upon the *Uttara–Kāṇḍa*. They may or may not enter into a debate on the theoretical question as to whether it is part of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa, *but, in practice they do not consider it to be a part of the Rāmāyaṇa.* For instance, people who do daily *pārāyaṇa* of the Rāmāyaṇa — that is, reading of the entire Rāmāyaṇa continuously, a portion of it each day — *do not include the U–K in such reading*. Public discourses on the Vālmīki–rāmāyaṇa, extending over several days, also end with the *paṭhṭhābhiṣeka* (the consecration of Rāma as king) and the *phalaśruti* verses of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa.* That is, the *U–K* is effectively considered as not belonging to the Rāmāyaṇa. The *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulsi Das has been discussed above, as also Kamban's *Irāmāvatāram* (*Kamba–Rāmāyaṇam*) in exquisite Tamil poetry, exceedingly popular in Tamilnadu among Hindus and non–

343 See p. 29 of U P Shah, *Introduction, Critical Edition of the Uttara–kāṇḍa,* Baroda, 1975 and C Sivaramamurti, *The Rāmāyaṇa in Indian sculpture* in V Raghavan (ed.), *The Rāmāyaṇa tradition in Asia,* Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1980. Sivaramamurti has given a long list of sculptures in various parts of India, and gives many details of the sculptures as depicting various scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa; *none* is from the *Uttara–kāṇḍa.*

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Hindus alike, and Viswanatha Satyanarayana's *Rāmāyaṇa kalpavṛkṣamu,* very popular among Telugu speaking people in the province of Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. All of them follow Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa and ignore the Sanskrit *U–K* (as seen above). In a lighter vein, we may add that many children (and parents) of today know the Rāmāyaṇa story [only] in the *Amar Citra Kathā* version (meant for children), a version which also ignores the *U–K* stories.

§21 From the evidence presented above, it is clear that a very large number of people in the past as well as a very large number in the present have rejected the claim that the *U–K* is a part of Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa. *Thus, according to tradition too, the U–K is not part of Vālmīkī's* Rāmāyaṇa. It is not surprising that most scholars are agreed that the *U–K* is a later composition and is not a part of the Rāmāyaṇa. The irony is that some scholars who hold this opinion yet make statements on personages in Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa by using the *U–K* as though it were a part — a seventh kāṇḍa — of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa.

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This book critically engages with several important events and statements found in Vālmīki's epic poem, the Rāmāyaṇa composed over 2500 years ago. Though certain methods were followed to preserve the Vedic texts, no serious methods were adopted to preserve the text of Rāṃāyaṇa. The poem spread to all parts of India and beyond through narrators of the epic who sometimes added their own explanatory verses to conform to local customs and traditions.

In the second half of the 20th century, scholars at the Baroda Oriental Research Institute, after many years of labour and examination of over 2000 different manuscripts, compiled what is now accepted as the most reliable version of the poem. Based on this critical edition, a condensed English version by Dr Parameswaran was earlier published by the Manipal University Press. In the present book, Dr Parameswaran reviews the critical interpretations of scholars like Sheldon Pollock, R P Goldman and Wendy Doniger and has analytic responses to many unanswered questions.

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